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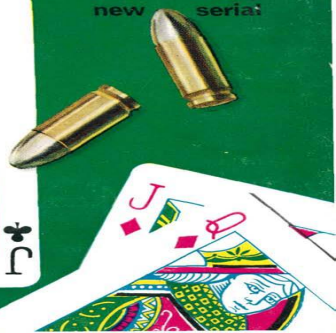

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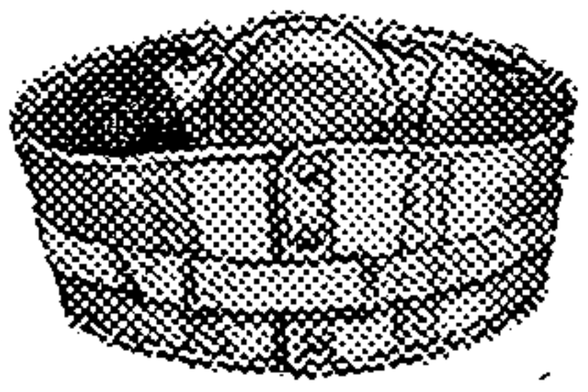

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Patches of White

BY WILLIAM SCOTT

I LIKED talking to Renshaw, because there was a Maugham-like quality about him. He had something of the Master's gift of keeping you intrigued as he unfolded a story, to round it off neatly at the end with an observation which brought the whole thing into perspective.

As was the case when he told me about Pierce, for instance.

I was having a drink with Renshaw at the club one evening when Pierce came in. He was a new member and I knew him only casually. But I did know that Pierce was making a name for himself in architecture, or rather he *had* been making a name for himself until he began to drink too much. I did not feel he was a good advertisement for the club. That night he was drunk again. Not objectionably drunk. Just privately drunk, as it were, sitting morosely by himself, drinking double whiskies and becoming more and more bemused.

Renshaw was ready with the explanation. "Pierce and his wife have broken up."

"But I understood they were a devoted couple."

"Ah—that was it."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you," said Renshaw.

Pierce idolised his wife. As their marriage progressed into three years he had grown to love her even more than on that, for him, wonderful day when he could hardly believe that anyone as beautiful as she was would consent to marry him.

The pride would show on his face when they entered a hotel lobby, say, or an airport lounge, and people could not help but turn and stare at the striking woman on his arm. At a party he would be content just to look admiringly at her as guests would invariably make her the focal point of their attention. He gave her expensive gifts, not only at the usual present-giving times, but whenever he saw something in a shop which he thought might please her. He designed and had built for her a delightful home on the outskirts of town. He had no interest in any other woman—or in anything but his work and his beautiful wife.

At the height of dreary winter he took her for a holiday to Balkezar, to soak up the sun for a few weeks.

She loved to sunbathe—wisely so, because a tan gave even more of an impact to her good looks. In a matter of a few days in Balkezar her skin was a rich honey-brown, offset so well by her golden hair, naturally bleached by the blazing sun.

One morning in their hotel she had awakened with a start

to see Pierce sitting on the edge of the bed looking down at her. He had drawn the covers back and she lay naked there in the warmth of the early sun streaming in through the window, the bronzed body in sharp contrast to the whiteness of the sheet.

She was about to raise her arms and draw him down to her, to make love, as they often did as an interruption to their dressing for dinner or changing to go down to the beach. But now she hesitated.

"Why are you frowning?" she asked.

"Oh, it's nothing."

"But there must be something, otherwise you wouldn't be frowning."

He reached forward and touched her breast, his fingers moulding the curve, the rough stud of her nipple against the smooth skin of his palm.

"The white patches," he said.

"The white —? Oh, you mean where my bikini has been?"

He nodded. "It spoils things. The patches of white here and the white line across your hips."

She smiled. "You are a strange one, darling."

"But it's true. They're like blemishes. You have such a lovely figure. Your breasts are so beautifully tanned, except for those white blobs at the end of each of them. It's sort of grotesque."

She laughed. "But what can I do about it? You surely don't want me to lie naked on the beach with everyone around?"

"There is something we can do about it."

Next day they moved out of the hotel to the villa he had rented along the coast. It was secluded to the point of loneliness. But whenever they felt the need of company they could go in to the resort and swim from the main beach or dance or visit the casino. And at the villa, away from everybody, she could sunbathe among the cypress trees or at the little stretch of private beach—free of the tiresome rigmarole of juggling with an undone bikini-top as one switched from back to front and all the other contortions which convention demands of the sunbathing female.

In no time the white patches were gone and she would lie on the whiteness of the bed for him to see and she would smile and say, "There you are, dear, imperfections all gone." He would look down at her, entranced, until gradually there

would come the restive movements of a woman being looked at, and when at length he was in her arms she would say, "You really are a strange one."

When they returned from Balkezar everybody said, "What a marvellous tan...you make me feel so pale...it's quite unfair..." and all the other envious things people say when confronted with a winter tan.

Wisely she made sure to set it off by wearing the two most favourable shades—white or black. White evening dresses for the tanned shoulders. A black shift by day that displayed so well the full length of her honey-brown arms.

She bought a special white evening gown for the annual architectural dinner and the impression she made was such that during the dancing that followed Pierce was proud, not displeased, that so many men wanted to dance with her.

He went through to the bar to replenish their drinks and, as he placed his order, two men were standing nearby, talking. Their backs were to him and they had apparently not noticed his arrival. He could overhear their conversation and it was obvious whom they were discussing.

"It makes her look even more stunning," one of them was saying.

"It does," said the other. "And the interesting thing is that she's tanned all over—and I do mean all over."

"Well...!" his companion said archly and he laughed.

"Which just shows you," Renshaw said to me, "that a woman can be the height of discretion as regards her affairs, only to be let down by a chance phrase overheard."

"She wasn't the loving wife Pierce thought she was?"

"Good heavens, no."

"But one would have thought she would be. The way he worshipped her—isn't that the sort of thing women long for? 'Tell me you love me,' they always say. 'If only you'd give me some attention.' Pierce was apparently dedicated to doing that."

By way of reply Renshaw said: "You know Faye Chalmers?"

"Yes."

"She was the one who filled me in with all the details, being such a close friend of Pierce's wife. Well, Faye told me she once said: 'He loves me, he's devoted to me, he idolises me. And I'm so bored by it all.'"

© William Scott 1966

WE ARE SEVEN

ILL-FATED, the Llangrwl International Festival of Music and Drama was.

Nothing you could lay your finger on, mind. Simply that the audiences never seemed to get there. Was it that Zion Chapel 1880, though architecturally impressive, lacked the panache of Edinburgh Castle? Was it because Llangrwl's most famous son, Zedekieh Rhees the hymn writer, had never made quite the popular impact of Stratford's famous son? Or was it because the only road fit for motors passed through the neighbouring town of Dinas?

"A strange thing, my dear Price," said Griffiths Mortimer, thoughtfully regarding his well-scrubbed fingers, "a strange thing that events organised by the Come to Dinas Committee should always clash with our International Festival."

Mr. Price, Chairman of the Come to Dinas Committee, stroked his drooping moustache. "Not suggesting there is anything deliberate about it, are you, Mr. Mortimer?"

"Oh, dear me no," said the Chairman of Llangrwl Rural District Council. "Know you better than to think that, Mr. Price." He laughed.

When Griffiths Mortimer laughed, Price the Provisions was always reminded of the tinkling of ice. "What date have you fixed for this year, Mr. Mortimer?" he asked, friendliness sparkling from his steel-rimmed glasses.

Gave him a wary look, did Griffiths Mortimer. But no point in being secretive about something you have advertised in the National Press. "August 15th," he said grudgingly.

"Well, there is a coincidence," said Price, slapping his thigh.

BY
E. L. MALPASS

Looked at him sourly, did Griffiths Mortimer. "What is the coincidence this time? Dinas Bowls Week?"

It was Mr. Price's turn to laugh. "Nothing like that, boy. Simply that my niece Bron Williams has booked that date to enter the Dinas Maternity Home. Nothing to do with the Come to Dinas Committee this time, Mr. Mortimer."

But it had a great deal to do with the Come to Dinas Committee. For what Mr. Price had omitted to report to his old friend was the gist of a conversation between Doctor Owen and his patient Bron Williams. "Sometimes feels like an entire football team milling about in there, Doctor," Bron had complained.

"Oh, wouldn't put it as high as that, Bron girl," said Doctor Owen. He looked at her thoughtfully. He closed his little bag, reached for his hat.

"But by damn, girl, wouldn't surprise me if you had enough for seven-a-side Rugby."

Spread like wildfire, the news did. Mrs. Megan Thomas, a human Early Warning System if ever there was one, Mrs. Megan Thomas was the first to pick up the message. And off hotfoot to Price's Emporium, her little Cadwallader clinging chimpanzee-like to her hand.

"Come to pay your bill, is it, Mrs. Thomas?" inquired Price, affable as you please, but with his glasses glinting, nevertheless.

A bit deaf at times, that Megan. "A bag of self-raising, Mr. Price, please, and what is this about your niece Bron

Williams, expecting seven they say: there is unprecedented."

Taken aback, Price was. But didn't show it, mind. Just shoved the self-raising over the counter and said, casual, "Expecting seven what, Mrs. Thomas?"

But at this point Cadwallader, who had been exploring the shop as was his wont, unwittingly sprang a mouse trap with his left foot and had to be taken home suffering from shock and indignation. So it was not until the evening that Price was able to pursue the matter further.

Didn't often catch Price in a pub. But that evening, oh, there was thirsty he was, so into The Red Dragon for a quick one. And who should be there, by a remarkable coincidence, but his nephew by marriage, Dai Williams. "Evening, Dai boy. Now what will you have?" said Price.

Startled, Dai was, by these unaccustomed words. So startled, in fact, that the words "Half of bitter" had passed his lips even while his brain was working out which cost more, a double whisky or a gin-and-vodka.

Regretfully he sipped his thin beer, and tried to discover from his uncle-in-law's features what was going on in that devious mind.

But without success. When it came to inscrutability, that old Egyptian Sphinx had nothing on Price the Provisions. And Price had two aids to inscrutability that the Sphinx never had —spectacles and a walrus moustache. The only thing Dai Williams could do was wait. He waited.

"And how is my niece Bron?" inquired Price.

"Damn well pregnant," said Dai.

"Well, there is news," cried Price, his face lighting up. "Calls for a celebration. Another half of bitter, now?" Oh, he was in a reckless mood tonight.

But verging on the taciturn, that Dai. Drove Morgan the Obsequies' hearse in the daytime, see, and the solemnity of this occupation seemed to have made a lasting mark. Price, however, was undeterred. "And what is the little stranger going to be, then?" he inquired, gushing like an oil-well.

"Don't know yet," said Dai.

Price sipped thoughtfully, sucked a few drops from his moustache. "Seem to remember there have been twins somewhere along the line in Bron's family," he said. "*There* would be a thing, boyo."

"Yes," said Dai.

"Could be triplets," said Price, slapping his nephew laughingly on the back. "Get a letter from the Queen for triplets,

I believe. Something to hang in the hall at Glendower Terrace, that would be."

Dai took a good swig.

"Funny thing," went on the relentless Price. "Sometimes hear tell of women having six or seven at a time. But not in Wales." He pondered. "No, boy. Never in the Principality. Due to the restraining influence of the Chapels, no doubt," he added smugly.

Left The Red Dragon in an ill humour, did Price. Flashing his money around was not a thing he enjoyed—especially when the result was nil. The next morning he turned the card to CLOSED on the Emporium door, drew down the little green blind, and set off to visit his niece Bron Williams.

He knocked at the humble door in Glendower Terrace. The door opened. Bron stood there beaming. "Why, Uncle Price. Come to offer felicitations on my pregnancy, is it?"

Oh, a nice girl, that Bron. Well-made, rosy-cheeked, friendly as they come. She took him into the dark little parlour, sat him down with a glass of elderberry. She smoothed her apron over her putative seven-a-side Rugby team. "Going to have seven according to Doctor Owen," she announced proudly.

Didn't turn a hair, that Price. But he wished heartily that he'd come to his niece first. Might have saved himself a lot of hard work and the cost of a pint. He said, very censorious, "No record of anyone else in our family having seven at one go. Verging on the prolific, it seems to me." He departed, leaving the good-natured Bron almost in tears. Five minutes later he was calling an Extraordinary Meeting of the Come to Dinas Committee.

"Many years ago," said Price, addressing the hastily-summoned Committee, "many years ago a woman, in Canada I believe, gave birth to quintuplets, thereby bringing upon herself and her husband both fame and fortune."

Looked at him sourly, the Committee did. Hadn't left their businesses at a moment's notice to be given a history lesson.

"But not only to her husband and herself," went on Price. "She brought a lasting and considerable fortune to her entire community."

The Committee pricked their ears up.

Price said, "My niece, a Dinas woman born and bred, has been assured by her medical adviser that she may give birth to septūplets."

There was a shocked silence. Then: "Oh, there is terrible," cried Evans the Fish, envisaging monsters.

"I mean seven babies at once," Price explained patiently. "So give or take a couple, she could still emulate, or even surpass, the feat of the Canadian lady."

He dropped his voice an octave. He grasped his lapels. He thrust his chin forward. "This, gentlemen, could put Dinas on the map—where she belongs."

Cottoning on slowly, the Committee were. Even Morgan the Obsequies, whose interests were naturally more in our going hence than in our coming hither, began to look agog. "Get a write-up in the *Dinas Advertiser*, maybe, Mr. Price," he suggested hopefully.

Price pulled off his spectacles and flung them down on the table before him, very dramatic. "The *Dinas Advertiser*, Mr. Morgan? This event, let me tell you, will be splashed over the front page of every newspaper in the land. Television cameras in the Dinas Maternity Home, Dr. Owen on *Desert Island Discs*, eminent obstetricians descending on us like—flies."

"Well, there is gratifying," said Evans the Fish.

Price put his glasses back on his nose. "There is, however, one unfortunate aspect of all this," he said, sadly. "This fierce glare of publicity is likely to be switched on at the same time as the Llangrwl International Festival."

Oh, very upset the Committee were, at the thought of stabbing their good friends of Llangrwl in the back, however innocently. But they bore it with fortitude. Couldn't interfere with the course of nature, could you, even if you wanted?

What they did not know, however, was that Mrs. Megan Thomas had a sister in Llangrwl—a sister with whom she often took tea in order to discuss the births, marriages, illnesses and deaths of their respective towns.

"Well, fancy," said Megan's sister, herself a compulsive knitter. "All those matinée coats and bootees. *Duw!*" Boggled, her imagination did.

"All that strained carrot!" said Megan. She shuddered.

But news travelled as fast in Llangrwl as in Dinas. And it did not take it long to reach the Council Offices and the ears of Griffiths Mortimer. And when it came to putting two and two together . . .

Carrying old Eli Prosser to his last resting place, they were. Morgan out in front, all black serge and dignity, then the

bearers with their heavy burden, then the mourners. But what is this? One of the mourners, a tall gentleman with a flowing white beard, has left the sad little procession and has returned for a word with the driver of the hearse.

Dai Williams, seeing Griffiths Mortimer approach, wound down the window. Very sad, Mr. Mortimer was looking. In his hand he carried his handkerchief, the more readily to dab his eyes. He put his head through the open window. "Pay you five quid a week more than old Morgan," he said, "if you come and work for the Llangrwl Co-op."

Taken aback, Dai was. Not used to being offered jobs during the committal service. "Doing what?" he asked warily.

"Driving the bread van, and the hearse when required. But very few deaths in Llangrwl's health-giving climate."

Well, there was tempting. But not one to rush into things, that Dai. "Mean a lot of travelling," he said, "to and from work."

Griffiths Mortimer stroked his silky beard. "No need to worry about that, boy. Got a nice little house waiting for you in Llangrwl. And the Co-op pantechnicon at your service for the removal, drive it yourself, maybe. Are you familiar with the works of Shakespeare, Mr. Williams?"

"No," said Dai. Didn't need to know Shakespeare to drive a bread van, did you?

Mortimer said, "There is a tide in the affairs of men, Mr. Williams, which taken at the flood leads on to fortune." He put a friendly hand on Dai's arm. "This is *your* tide, boy," he said with an earnest air.

There was a silence. Then Dai said, "Expecting, my wife is. Wouldn't want to move before the happy event, of course."

Mortimer smiled, but shook his head. "Mustn't shilly-shally, must we?" he said. "A private ward has already been reserved at the Llangrwl Maternity Home."

"But—but how did you know all this?"

Mr. Mortimer shrugged. "A little bird," he said. He pulled out his wallet, gave Dai his card. "We make only one stipulation," he said. "That you inform us of your decision

within twenty-four hours." He walked away, very dignified, sighing and dabbing his eyes.

The little bell over the door of Price's Emporium jangled furiously. Price looked up, to see Morgan the Obsequies fairly bouncing into the shop.

"What is it, Mr. Morgan?" he asked. "Those old doctors been interfering with the work of the Fell Reaper again, is it?"

"Oh, worse than that!" cried Morgan. Like many Welshmen, he had a face specially designed for imparting disaster—dark, sorrowful, expressive eyes, mouth puckered into a perfect O of calamity.

"Worse than that, Mr. Price. Suborned Dai Williams, they have."

Price waited, not knowing what suborned meant, but fearing the worst.

Morgan came and leaned on the counter. He thrust his face close to the anxious provision merchant's. "Offered him a *job—and a house—in Llangrwl.*"

The two men stared at each other in silence. Not many things can strike two Welshmen dumb, but black treachery is one of them. It wasn't so much the loss to themselves and their town—they could have borne that. It was the discovery that men—and men they knew, men from a neighbouring and friendly town—could stoop so low. They felt as the Trojans must have felt when those old Greeks began to climb out of the horse.

"Has he—accepted?" Price asked in a dreadful voice.

Morgan hung his head. "Yes," he whispered.

Oh, it was unbearable. Treachery piled on treachery. Not only one's neighbours, now, but one's own family. But Price met the challenge. He drew himself up to his full height. In this crisis he was prepared for *any* sacrifice. "You must offer him double," he said simply.

"Double?" Morgan almost squeaked. "Double, Mr. Price?" He steadied himself against the counter. "Do you know what the margin of profit is in the undertaking business?"

It was too much. Oh, the sorrow in Price's voice. And the amazement. And the reproach. "At a time like this, Mr. Morgan, you can talk of *profit*?"

Looked ashamed of himself, the undertaker did, and little wonder.

But there was Price already turning the card on his door to CLOSED.

"Where are you going, Mr. Price?"

"To see my niece Bron," said Price grimly. "To see whether, in fact, blood is really thicker than water."

"Why, Uncle Price," Bron greeted him happily. "Heard about our good news, is it?"

Price walked rather shakily into the house. Seemed to have aged considerably since his last visit.

"*Good* news, did you say?" he asked bitterly. "You call it *good* news to abandon your old uncle in his declining years?"

She sat him down with a glass of elderberry. "But we're not abandoning you, Uncle. We're only going a few miles up the road."

He passed a shaking hand over his eyes. "You're all I've got, Bron girl. Surely you could have waited—a year or two, perhaps less." He gave her a wan smile. "Always taken comfort, I have, from the thought that it would be Dai, my nephew, who would steer the equipage to my last—resting place."

Wept into his elderberry, he did.

Very distressed, the warm-hearted girl was. She put a loving hand on her uncle's quivering shoulders.

"Don't take on, Uncle *bach*. Visit you at Christmas, we will."

The front door opened. Bron ran to meet her husband. "Uncle Price is here, love, and he is taking on because we are moving."

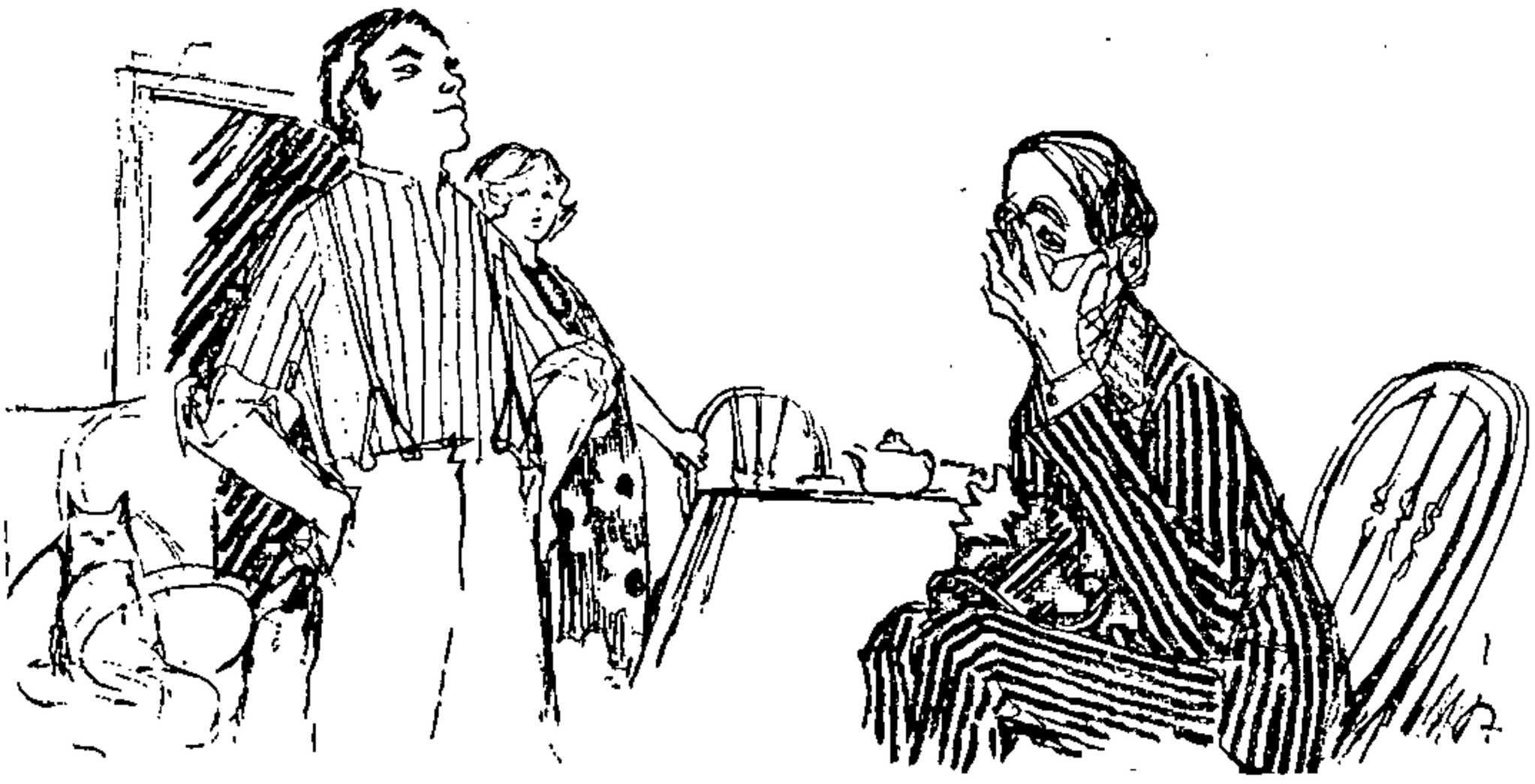
"Very affecting," said Dai, sardonic.

Price had his hand over his eyes in his distress. But he could see something of Dai between his fingers, and what he saw did not encourage him. He was never one to give in, however.

He said in a broken voice, "Was hoping you'd take over the business one day, Dai boy. A little gold mine it is," he added confidentially.

His heart leapt. Dai looked like a salmon telling himself that *this* fly *couldn't* have a line and a rod and a man attached. And Bron said, "Oh, Uncle, there is kind. Never realised you felt like that about us."

Dai said, "Well, no difficulty there. We could be back in Dinas in half-an-hour when you kick the—when the time comes."



Price said, "If you want the business you stay in Dinas—or else."

"Well, there is arbitrary," said Dai.

"Take it or leave it," said Price, rising and jamming his bowler back on his head.

A difficult choice, isn't it, between a little jam today and a lot of jam tomorrow? But it was Bron who decided. A girl of spirit, that one, for all her friendliness. "Can't buy us off like that, Uncle," she said coldly. "Got our own lives to lead, and we are going to Llangrwl as arranged." She too stood up.

"Time you were going, now, Uncle. Keeping Dai from his tea, you are."

Not one to admit defeat, that Price, however bitter the taste of it in his mouth might be. Off now to see his old friend Griffiths Mortimer at Llangrwl. And a very embarrassing errand it was.

"Felt I couldn't sit idly by without giving you a word of warning," he said uncomfortably.

"Well, there is kind," said Griffiths, deeply touched. "Never one to spare yourself a duty, however unpleasant, I know that, Mr. Price."

Pleased, Price looked, at this simple tribute. Perhaps it made what he had to say a little easier. "Heard you are offering employment to Dai Williams," he said, no beating about the bush.

Mortimer's eyebrows shot up.

"You know nothing against him, I hope? A man of estimable character, I judged him."

Price looked at the floor. "Wouldn't trust him with the meagre contents of a blind beggar's tin bowl," he said.

His old friend was regarding him closely. "Oh, how difficult, Mr. Price. And Williams already installed in both job and house.

"Maybe," he went on thoughtfully, "we have acted with undue precipitancy."

"Maybe," Price said sadly. Bled for his old friend, his heart did.

But a man of honour, that Griffiths Mortimer. Despite this friendly warning, he took no action. Dai Williams continued to drive the Co-op bread van as the spring slowly ripened into summer, and the summer began to knock at the doors of autumn. For what is this? August is passing, the Llangrwl International Festival of Music and Drama is about to begin, and Bron Williams has made no sign. Dai keeps the bread van outside the house every night. Griffiths Mortimer meets Bron in the street and bows courteously, with no hint of the anxiety that is consuming him.

But then, at last, it happens. At three in the morning! Bron sits up in bed sudden.

"We're off, boyo," she says cheerfully.

Five minutes later they are in the bread van, lurching crazily down the road.

And not twelve hours later there is Bron sitting up in bed again. But this time in the Maternity Home; beaming away, with three in one arm and four in the other, being photographed from all angles.

But who is this gentleman so courteously leading the reporters up to the bedside, strolling learnedly with the eminent obstetricians, gently discouraging a photographer here, a too-eager visitor there? Who is this gentleman who still has time to direct Festival patrons into the hastily-opened car park beside the Maternity Home?

Well, there is easy, you will say. Griffiths Mortimer of Llangrwl, of course.

No by damn, it isn't. It is Price the Provisions, of Dinas, great-uncle to the already-famous new arrivals. Price the Provisions, enjoying to the full a moment of well-earned triumph . . .

For when the bread van went lurching down the street, Bron said quietly, "Turn right at the end, boy."

"Don't be silly, girl," said her husband. "Dinas only, that way."

"And it is to Dinas that I want to go," said Bron.

Stopped the van, did Dai. "Never knew an occasion less opportune for shilly-shallying," he said. "But just sit here and think it over quiet, girl. Forgetting, maybe, that you have a private ward reserved at the Llangrwl Home?"

"And another one at Dinas," said Bron. "Made private arrangements, I did. Couldn't bear to think of having a confinement in Llangrwl, somehow."

Very put out, Dai was. "Couldn't have mentioned it sooner, I suppose?"

She smiled up at him. "Thought it best to tell you when you weren't in a position to argue." She waited. "Well, do we go on to Dinas or do we have the babies in the bread van?"

Shook him, that did. They roared off.

"We could still go to Llangrwl," he said. "Expecting us, they are."

"Oh, another thing I forgot to mention," said Bron. "Uncle Price said he would leave us the business after all, if we'd just have the babies in Dinas. Said it was a question of sentiment, the old gentleman did."

Dai snorted. Hadn't much time for sentiment himself, and despised it in others. Still, he supposed he'd better humour the old boy. After all, he *was* Bron's uncle. Dai took the road to Dinas.

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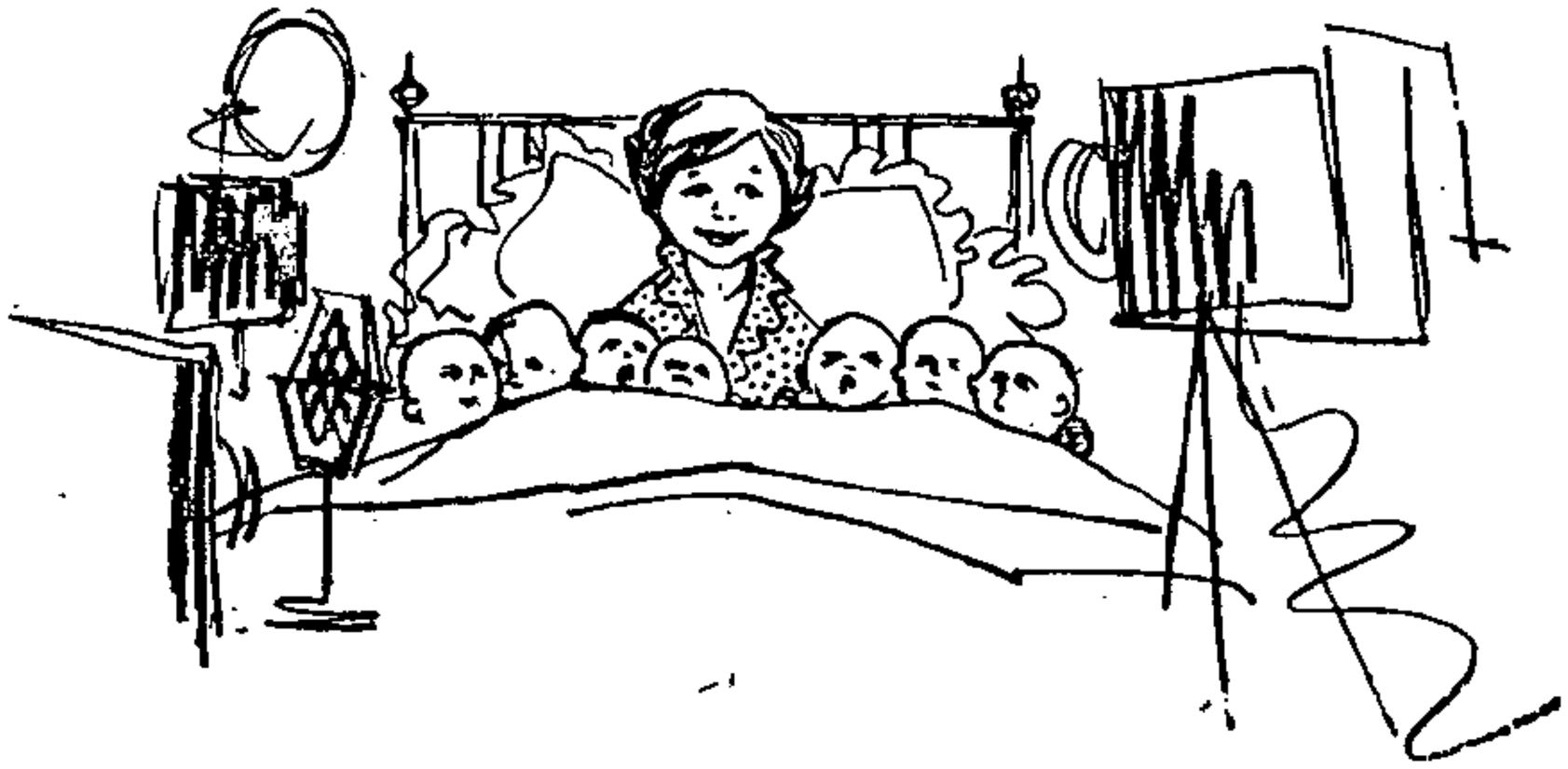

by William Saroyan

CRYING MAN OF PARIS

YOU saw him when the Germans marched into Paris, his picture on the front page of every newspaper. There he was, a tall man with a long face. A strong man, too, one might say.

Opinions varied about him. My zavzak cousin, Vask Bashmanian said, "Everybody thinks he's crying for France, but look at the man. He's a millionaire crying because he's going to lose a little money, that's all. These men who cry don't *help*! They always cry for themselves. The man who laughs the way I do, there's the man who helps, but do you see anybody putting *my* picture in the paper? No! I hate the big bawl-baby, whoever he is."

Zavzak means something like what it sounds like—not zigzag, which is also probably Arabic or some such, but zavzak—the laughing scoffer. Turkish, maybe, but used by all Armenians, or at any rate by all of them that I grew up with, the Bashmanians of Fresno—only by that time we were in San Francisco, failing there just as easily as we had failed in Fresno, but laughing all the time, the most serious people I ever met.

The year was 1941, and if nobody among us had become a success of one sort or another, neither had any of us thrown in the sponge. We were all still able to believe we might just come through, after all. The war looked phony and we weren't sure it wasn't going to end with a lot of signatures all over a piece of paper on a table somewhere. The Maginot

Line hadn't held, except in the newsreels, and its collapse was an international joke. Why would anybody bother bucking something like that when they could go around it, for instance?

One or two of us had started out as if our clothes were on fire, as my son put it twenty-two years later. He had seen his father on a television programme in which unsuspecting people were spied upon by a concealed camera and then embarrassed into laughing at the outrage they had felt a moment ago when a small baby was placed in the arms of one of them by the baby's mother so she could go into the saloon for only two dry martinis.

By that time my son was at the University of Chicago and he just happened to drop into one of the loafing rooms there where a television was on. All of a sudden, the fellow who ran the TV show talked about my son's father, and then his father came out from behind a curtain and began to talk, leaving the script because the script took the attitude that if you were there, if you were on that programme, if you were part of that high-spirited fun-loving idea, you *had* to be important, famous and an admirer of all sorts of embarrassing American things, like success at the expense of totally unimportant people belittled and then bullied into laughing it off.

"You looked like a slob from the Bowery," he said, "but you came on like your clothes were on fire and everybody in that room started smiling and asking one another, 'Who's *he*?' Somebody looked at me and then back at you, and then at me again, and then he said, 'You look a little like this guy, how come?' So I told him."

"I hope you weren't embarrassed."

"Hell, no. Why should I be? I just said, 'He's my father.' Everything you said was zavzak. I didn't really used to know the meaning of that word until I saw you on TV that night. What happened?"

"Well, the stuff they had written for me to remember and recite I couldn't say, but at the same time I had to say something and I didn't want to be rude, so I did my best to earn the five thousand dollars they paid me."

"Five thousand?"

"That's right. Well, they didn't pay *me*, exactly. They paid the Tax Collector. I don't remember what I said, or how I said it, although I'll never forget how I felt—silly, I mean. Because everything in this country, especially everything in art, or popular art, in television or in movies, always wants to take itself very seriously, always wants to be big and important and

astonishing and a lot of other things it never is. I was there for the money, and I was stuck. You *might* easily have been embarrassed. I'm glad you weren't."

By the time my son accidentally saw the taped TV show, I was back in Europe, back in Paris, where the crying man had been in 1941 when the Germans marched into the city.

Well, Paris is a kind of place everybody who doesn't live there flips about, but it's not really that kind of place at all, or at any rate it never was for me. I went there first in 1935, the first time I left America, and I was there again in 1939 just before the war started, and then I was there again after Paris was liberated, as the saying is, and then again in 1949, and again and again, and then finally, in 1959, I went there to live. Paris for me was certainly never what it was for the Americans who went there after the 1914-1918 war. It was just another place in which to look for a bed somewhere, and at the end of the day to go there and get in the bed.

But whenever I was in Paris I remembered the crying man and I looked for him in the streets. He had been on the Champs-Elysées when the photographer had taken his picture, so I imagined I might see him there again, twenty years later. When he wept he appeared to have been in his early forties, but he also appeared to be a man who enjoyed good health, the sort who doesn't show his years and isn't likely to change much. I was sure I'd recognise him the minute I saw him, and I had a mind to stop him, and if he happened to speak English, as I was quite sure he did, I had a mind to ask him courteously why, if he knew, he had cried that day, because a thing like that interests me.

I think a thing like that interests me more than the origins of the war, even, or the history of it. I believed he would frequently walk on the Champs-Elysées, back in business again. I was sure he was a man of action, of *business* action at any rate, and no nonsense when it came to the details by which any man succeeds in business and becomes wealthy—not on behalf of France, but on behalf of himself—himself misunderstood, most likely.

"Excuse me, sir," I had a mind to say. "I hope you won't mind, but I'm sure you're the man I have been hoping to find in Paris for twenty years. I'm sure you know who I mean, the man I'm thinking of. *Are* you that man?"

And if he was in fact that man I was sure he would own up to it, not necessarily because he wasn't embarrassed about the

whole thing and had long since forgotten it, or at any rate had put it out of his mind, but because I had considerable experience in chatting courteously with total strangers and almost immediately they had understood that I was not an enemy, not a scoffer, not somebody being zavzak, but a student of the mystery of life; a student of the human character in all of its complications, contradictions, inconsistencies and unaccountables. I was sure he would own up to it and we would sit down at a sidewalk table and go over the whole thing.

The answers I imagined him making were very interesting:

"To tell you the truth, I wasn't actually crying. I was about to sneeze. The whole thing was an accident, a trick of photography. I saw photographers taking photographs, but I never imagined I was in any of them, so that when I saw the photograph I was at first not sure it was myself. It really didn't look like me. I had never imagined myself looking like that. I have other photographs, several by Harcourt of Paris over the years, and there was never a suggestion of anything of that kind in any of Harcourt's photographs. After studying the picture for a moment, though, I finally recognised myself, mainly from the rest of myself, not the crying face which was actually the face just before sneezing. And then suddenly I saw the photograph in many papers, and I didn't quite know whether to be ashamed or proud. Finally, rather anonymously I may say, I began to be glad that I was unwittingly serving France and the cause of freedom and culture."

Another time: "Yes, I cried. I couldn't help it. Like everybody else standing there I really didn't know *what* to feel. It was a very confusing time. There they were marching up the Champs-Elysées, the hated Germans. I watched the young marching German soldiers—healthy, strong, clean-cut, every one of them ready to die for Germany, but not necessarily for Germany alone, perhaps also ready to die for France, for Paris, and then it began to happen, because it *was* such a confusing time, ready to die for *me,* all of them, one by one, endless numbers of them. I was doing quite all right, so of course it wasn't necessary for *any* of them to die for me. And that's when I cried—because I was confused and couldn't tell anybody it simply wasn't necessary."

But I didn't stop looking for the man simply because I had imagined all kinds of replies and explanations and accounts of how and why he had cried. I wanted to see him again. This sort of thing happens to a writer now and then. For instance,

I've been at work on a movie for thirty years in which the whole plot is the search for the unnamed immigrant girl who is at work on the third of thirty sewing-machines in a New York shirt factory in 1911. The photograph came out in the *Literary Digest* in 1922 when the imaginary man who made the search was a prosperous dentist of thirty-three and didn't like the way his life was going. In San Francisco.

At first he searched by writing letters, but after he had accumulated a lot of clues, he sold his business and hit the road, starting, naturally, in New York. He wasn't sure why he needed to look for the girl, but he believed it was because she was quite obviously an angel, most likely from Poland, as most of the girls at that shirt factory were, according to the *Literary Digest*.

The question is, does he find her? And if he does, is she in fact an angel? Was she ever in fact an angel? Well, of course, that's the idea—how could she be, how could she have been? So why had he been compelled to search all over the country for her? Well, perhaps it was because he was a kind of nutty dentist, if you want to put it that way.

In the various gambling joints I went to in Paris, where I began to know people, I inquired about the crying man, but I was astonished to discover that most of the people I spoke to had no idea who I was talking about. If they had seen the photograph, they had forgotten it. If they hadn't forgotten it, they simply said they had no idea *who* the man might be. They certainly hadn't heard of anybody who had known him.

And so the imagined accounts continued:

"Yes, I am the man, but I hope you won't be awfully let-down that I was paid one hundred francs to cry on camera, so to say, at a time when I needed money badly. I am an actor, and actually not French at all. I just happened to have been in Paris at that time, and you can understand that I wanted to get back to Zürich as soon as possible. We are neutral, as you know. Always have been. It was a job, like any other, and very easy for me, as I can cry any time I like simply by remembering Columbus at sea."

"Why does Columbus at sea impel you to cry?"

"I really don't know, but whenever I imagine him standing on that small ship surrounded by all that water late at night in 1492 I'm overwhelmed. Columbus is misunderstood. He was a good man. A very good man."

Finally, not so much in despair as in anger—about another matter entirely, however, which I am not at liberty to drag

into this story—I *insisted* that a man who looked something like the crying man explain to me why he had cried that day. This man was one of the decoys at the Grand Cercle. He *was* French, he was tall, he had a long face, he had dignity, and we were at the bar drinking.

He said, "I'm not the man. How can I tell you why it happened?"

"You can *pretend,* can't you? You've got nothing to do right now, and you *have* cried, I presume, so tell me why you cried when the Germans marched up the Champs-Elysées that day in 1941. You were standing just over there, across the street. Twenty years ago. Why? How did it happen?"

"Listen," he said. "Maybe you won't believe this, but the fact is I did watch them march up the Champs-Elysées that day, and I *did* cry, although I'm not the man in the photograph. I'm not sure exactly why I cried, but I remember that all of a sudden I felt awfully tired, deathly tired, and like a small boy who is terribly tired I wanted to fall into my bed, which knew me better than even God knew me, and I wanted to forget the whole world, but I knew there was no forgetting of the world for me, there could never again be any forgetting of it for me, and this scared me and I felt that I would soon be dead, and so I cried. Well, I *was* in the Resistance, as you may have heard from some of the boys here at the Club, and every day of the war years *was* a deathly day for me, but now here I am, still who I had always been, a nothing, a nobody."

"You did that very well," I said, "and only a moment ago you said you *couldn't* pretend."

"I'm *not* pretending," he said. He got down from the stool at the bar and hurried into the gaming-room.

A couple of months later I was back in San Francisco and ran into Vask Bashmanian again. "Why did he cry?" I said.

"Who?"

"That guy in Paris when the Germans marched up the Champs-Elysées?"

"Are you still thinking about that stupid millionaire, for God's sake? He cried for the same reason that all of them are *always* crying. The money is what he was crying about, all that wonderful good new money he knew he was going to make out of the war. He was crying from happiness. Did anybody ever see a photograph of the face of a soldier just before he dies? No! Who cares why a soldier cries or dies?"

I'm not satisfied, though. I'd still like to know why he cried.

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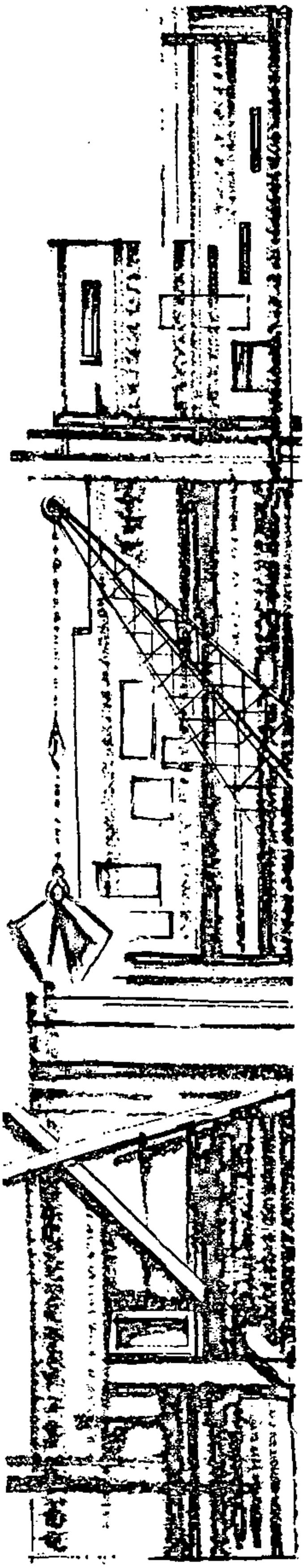

This man with hobnails on his feet and his head in the stars

MAKER OF CITIES

by Rupene Ruapapere

MY father was so tall he could reach you down a star. My mother said this. And it was she who never let us forget he was a maker of cities. She spoke of him as if he were still alive, and it kept him in that house in a way. Even my brother, his eighth son, who was born five months after his death, grew up knowing him as a red-haired man that tried for a place on the earth; and the father he never saw came to be his hero, as he was ours.

They think I'm talking a lot of bull when I open up on the old man. They think I'm an ear-bashing salesman trying to sell them something. I'm not trying to sell them anything. I'm just telling them. They can take it or leave it.

My mother met him in church. She was sitting at one end of the pew and he at the other. Ten Sundays and every Sunday he winked at her until, one Sunday, he wrote a note and put it on the plate that was passing and she, who'd

caught his nod, plucked it off and read it against her prayer-book. It said: *Either you marry me or I turn pagan.*

She knew then that he had already made himself her responsibility. The next Sunday they didn't sit at opposite ends of the pew. They sat at one end together. They walked the aisle in that same church. My mother said it was quiet, full of evening, with the sparrows twittering in the eaves, a haven away from the world.

He didn't have any great learning, my father. He left school at twelve to go to work. But he had a good brain. There was no soup about his thinking. He didn't get it out of books, either. It was original. And his talk was simple, direct, sincere, though sometimes you mightn't think so, the way he went to town on the words. He said to my mother: You believe in me and I will shake the world on its axis. I will put out the sun with the spit from my lips. I will go far and fast, spinning the earth under my feet like an acrobat on a ball. You believe in me and I will have faith everlasting. He said this to my mother, though he was a big man, afraid of nothing, equipped for the rigours of civilisation, and though she was a girl, defenceless, inexperienced, unsure.

And he said this: How do I love you? Listen, like a clock. My thoughts are the hands on that clock, and twenty-four hours a day they move around the figures and the figures are you. I spend five minutes thinking of one of your sweet qualities and then I go on to the next. You ask me how do I love you. Well, that's how.

My father in time learned his limitations and settled for them. He was content to be what he was as long as he could be it well. He found his interest and it satisfied him. Our house was a house of peace. We went through times of plenty and times of poverty. But there were no breaks in the link of our family. We shared the same hob and the same fire-light.

Men have said to me: Who are you talking about? Jesus Christ? They've said: Your father was only a bloody buck navvy; where do you get all this back-yard wonder stuff? He took his lunch to work. He ate it sitting with a line of men along a wall. He had one suit for Sunday best. He went for a walk down to the park at the weekends, or snored off. He had a bet on a horse. He took a drink. He went to the local bug-house and saw pictures three years old. An ordinary bloke he was, that's all, like any of us, but God, you won't know that in twenty years with this propaganda going on.

Sure, I say, a worker, that's all, in a uniform of dungarees stained with clay, a grey flannel shirt, a coat with the elbows going, and a handkerchief knotted in four corners on his head; but he built a precipice of steel and concrete and changed a skyline. He diverted the river of the wind. He put solidity in space where space had been space from the beginning.

He was a man who looked down on the sprawl of the city as many times as he looked up to the terminus of its heights. He knew its proportions and perspectives. Below him it was a dwarf, above him a giant. He saw the city in all its magnifications.

And he worked on the floor of that city, trenching and shafting, among the roots buried there like the roots of trees. He opened the earth, plexed with the guts of that city, and made new branches for the spread of its nerves. You don't think of it like that, I say to them. It's different when you do.

Skeins of cables carrying light and sound, packed, he said, with messages of life and death and every human emotion and thought; pipes like arteries bringing water at the turn of a tap. More than that, these things showed you what an organism a city was. It was just like a man, fleshed, blooded and muscled with human counterparts. It sickened like a man and grew tired. It had to rest.

Men like him had widened and paved the bullock tracks. Down successively with the old buildings, begun with axes from the First Fleet, and up with the new. Shift the dead from their noisy cemetery, tranquil bush when they died, and raise the Town Hall over their graves. Shift the dead yet again for the spreading city wants their ground for its factories and its tenements. He was the descendant of men like that.

He told me. He said: I love this city. I'm proud to know it the way I do, to be with it the way I am. I want to say in later years, when I'm old and done and see my sons bringing home their sons, that I was one of its makers.

My old man had no inscription on a scroll that he might keep as a record of his days as a worker. When a job is finished you go to another. The management dines on champagne at a banquet. There is no ceremony for the workers. There is a building downtown, a tower in space, and its secrets are locked in its ordinariness. To see that building now no man would guess at the story behind it . . . at the vale of tears between its rock foundation and its flagpole.

Fourteen floors and hundreds of windows, this building. An army of men worked to build it. One of them was Michael

Sweeney. The building resisted the efforts of the workers. Space fought tooth and nail against the climbing conqueror. A hurricane wind blew in March; the scaffolding collapsed. Nineteen men injured, one dead. Sweeney was one who patiently built it up again. Ramsay, the riveter, died in the middle of a laugh. He missed his step and fell a hundred feet. This man was Sweeney's best friend. From his gantry, perched on a ledge in space, a man named Williams raised great trusses and beams of steel. Sweeney rode a girder into the air.

Suddenly it happened. Williams dropped dead in the gantry. The cables scorched through the pulleys. The girder hurtled down, swinging crazily. Sweeney was tilted off and flung against a scaffolding. He grasped the edge with his fingers, space yawning below him. The girder swung clashing and clanging against the skeleton ramparts and crashed to the earth, smashing beams like matchsticks.

They got to Sweeney, dragged him to safety. Three of his ribs were broken. He asked for a smoke.

The human polypi started again. Stone by stone was laid, beam by beam placed, and the building was finished against the odds of weather and illness and accident, and now a flag streams from its top.

What do kids know about Depressions? You can't convince them with claptrap about budgets, economics, and the mathematics of living. They only know they're hungry and expect to be satisfied. When they're not satisfied, they cry. My old man saw that we didn't cry . . .

There is a bridge I could show you that exacted punishment. He was on that bridge—and lucky to be on it when men walked the streets and peered through rusty gates into weedy factory yards. He carried the stones that made it with nothing in his belly but bread and fat. And sometimes nothing at all. He worked with a bag, one corner thrust in to form a cowl, over his head. The rain soaked the bag and it lay like a cold blanket on his back. He burned with fever and pleurisy and coughed yellow phlegm that caught in his throat like fly-paper.

Double pneumonia. An even chance, the doctor said. It was all up to him. We waited, eyes on the clock. A see-saw of sound falling on the ears, time carrying today into tomorrow. How much of time was left in him, battling away in a hospital ward? What was in the hour? The end of a laugh ringing in the house? The heritage of an empty chair? The stilling of hands—the tools and the wealth of the worker?

No, not yet. Not yet. God, there was joy.

There were testimonials all down the line when they thought he was a goner, the best that men can pay:

He'd give you the shirt off his back.

You never heard him say a bad word about anybody.

Mick—he'd never see you stuck. Straight as a die, too.

When he lived they said nothing; but they slapped me on the back and warmly shook my hand as though I was him. What more does a man want than to be a good thought in the minds of men, a clean, kind sound on their tongues?

Many and many a time my old man said to me, and to my brothers, he said: The thing is to be a man and true to yourself. Have no secrets that you have to keep in dark corners of your mind. Truth is a great thing; don't let it down. And though I fathered you, there's a Father that fathered all of us and you hurt no-one but yourself to disown Him. And remember this—the strongest, biggest, greatest man on earth is no stronger than clay, no bigger than a coffin, and no greater than the good or evil he does.

My father died towards evening, a few minutes after the knock-off whistle. He told Sam Brady he'd catch up with him in the pub. He made a cigarette. He was just putting on his coat when the earth came down. It sounded like the boom of a waterfall suddenly heard. Men ran back along the tunnel, through the smoke of dust. Brady was the first to reach my father. He saw my father's head and that was all. The rest of him was buried as if he had been plugged in a hole in a hill. The air whistled through his nostrils. He coughed and his blood stained the dirt.

Shouts and shovels and sweat—what use?

The city killed him. You can see that city like an altar. Men are sacrificed on it. They die in its name. They give their lives for its bridges, its subways, its streets, in the cause of progress, enterprise, and the pursuit of bread and butter, But there is no roll-call for them, and no honour.

They do not say: He died in the cause of his country. There is no tablet, set in concrete, chiselled in marble, gilt-lettered, to say: *This is to the memory of Michael Sweeney, who begot seven Australian sons and provided for them from his toil on this project. This project is proud to have nourished the seven Australian sons of Michael Sweeney, brought up to love God and their fellow men.* Purple is it? Purple's better than nothing. And the truth is any colour.

That tunnel was his mausoleum. The job was his executioner. I don't care what the bloody hell they say, he was a martyr. He died for the thousands that go through that tunnel in hammering trains night and day. The city stepped ahead, and he died. His sweat dropped into that soil, his blood spilled into it, and that much of him is there for ever.

Brady came and told my mother as she was setting the table. She couldn't believe it. She sat there numb, wordless. She couldn't think that he would not turn the knob and come down that hall in a few minutes, dragging the smell of food into his nostrils, saying how good it smelled, his eyes bright with the pleasantness of home at the end of the day, the tiredness falling from him. She couldn't believe that his footfalls had for her vanished from the earth at 5.30 last night, the time he came in. The roast was sizzling in the oven, the vegetables simmering in the pots, the ninth place was set. It was all wrong. The news made it seem like a horrible pantomime.

My mother had thought of it happening. She thought of it in the solitudes that belong to women: a fear born of love. She turned to him in the bed beside her and put an arm tight around him and the reason he never knew. Sometimes it came, too, like a cloud passing over the sun; she might be polishing a floor, singing, or boiling the copper, and it would arrest her action and put a dread in her eyes.

She saw him lost to her. She imagined her reactions. She saw herself screaming when they broke the news, and the neighbours rushing in; clearing out to be alone in the streets with her agony, wishing to die. But now it had happened she didn't feel like that at all. She felt so calm, she said, it seemed disloyal. Maybe it was because she had died many times.

You can't love a man, she said, and not feel anxiety for him in his absence. You want to see him come home. When habit was broken, it set off alarm in her. She waited for him that night he was held up by a traffic jam. She thought of ringing the police. She kept going out to the gate looking for him. And when he came home he found her cranky as hell. When she burst into tears and he asked her why, she said she was just tired and it was nothing. But she was crying because she felt foolish and angry at being the helpless victim of emotions that could hurt her.

My father had tried to say something, a whispered shout ejected with his last vitality. Brady had dropped down, his ear to the broken mouth, desperately trying to catch the words.

But there was only a vomited gabble of breath and blood and sound. In anguish, my mother wanted to know what it was he had tried to say. Then she was glad she didn't know, because to her it could have been one of many things:

I told you, Mary, a man is only one jump ahead of death all the time.

God is just, merciful; He wouldn't let me go if it wasn't to be all right with you.

This is the miracle. This is where I come face to face with the toilers of antiquity and the lions of the ages. This is where I meet Shakespeare and Aquinas like you meet men on the street corner.

There were these things and others to choose from, all consoling, and they could be true, for my mother knew him and his mind. And since there was no way of telling what those last words were, there was none of telling what they were not.

This house will seem empty, my mother said, and it will be hard. But your father is in it still. He is in everyone here, and he will be around and about as he always was, only we'll not see him with our eyes, only with our hearts and our souls.

My father's life was worth a few hundred pounds in compensation. It helped. But it couldn't put the gloves on with you out in the back-yard. You couldn't ask it questions and hear wisdom from it. It had no authority you respected and were glad to acknowledge. It didn't fill the double bed, too wide for one, where my mother lay alone, unhusbanded and unlovered.

I know what they say. Nothing like those bloody Sweeneys for sticking together, they say. Julius Caesar's not in it with their old man. He sits on a throne. They've put him on a pedestal like an idol. Hobnails on his feet and his head in the stars. He whistled and the sun did a jig. Get a Sweeney talking on his old man and you'll hear the Song of Solomon jazzed up like you never heard it before.

But who cares what they say? What do they know?

From my father I learned to see dynasties in a trowel. I saw the hub of kingdoms in a hammer and chisel, and nails were a symbol of the settled orders of men in the universe. And I remember him saying: These things have their place in any museum, for they are the implements of civilisation, as sure as a wheel is round: the tools used by man to build a world that housed and served him. But they are thought common, and people would laugh to see them in a museum,

though the same people would gaze at the strange and primitive devices of their forbears and say: So that's how they did things—what remarkable people.

I think of it this way. I see the buildings and the bridges and the quays and the roads and the subways he made—I see this city that sprang from a tent and came to greatness in the toilers' hands. And I think of the workers that built the memorable and immemorial things of the world; the ones that built the craft of Columbus and broke their hands on the Wall of China; the makers of the pyramids, the Smiths and the Browns of Egypt, the little people born to obscurity and anonymity.

I see it like that, and I think of my old man as one of these. He was a nobody, but there are monuments to him everywhere. His hands touched the rivets that have gone cold. His muscles strained against the weight of that set concrete: in that pylon, in that pillar. His eyes beheld the inching into place of that giant girder. He made history, but he's not in the books. His name is unknown, but he was a maker of cities.

© Rupene Ruapapere 1966

"Once more, and we'll call it a day!"

On your marks!

1. Where and when did Roger Bannister run the first four-minute mile?
2. What are the events in the modern pentathlon?
3. Ron Clarke set two new world records in one race on July 14th 1965, at Oslo, Norway. What were they?
4. Who gained four track and field gold medals in the 1936 Olympic Games at Berlin?
5. How many times has the modern Olympiad been cancelled and for what reasons?
6. What is the weight of the men's discus?
7. How many Olympic gold medals have the Russian sisters Tamara and Irina Press won between them?
8. (a) Exactly how long is the Marathon? (b) Why is it this distance?
9. Who was the "Immortal Loser" disqualified after reaching the stadium in the 1908 Olympic Marathon, and why was he disqualified?
10. Who was the first man to putt the shot farther than 70 ft.?
11. How many attempts is an athlete allowed at each height in the pole vault?
12. Who was the housewife who won four gold medals in the 1948 Olympic Games at Wembley, London?
13. What was the distance of the longest race ever recorded in athletic history?
14. When was judo first introduced into the modern Olympiad?
15. In which year were the British Commonwealth Games last held in the British Isles? Where did they take place?

Answers are on page 64

ARGOSY PROFILE

William SANSOM

Close-up of a writer who cares about his work, about people—who paints, has a musical up his sleeve, and has even had a song in the Top Ten

BY ARTHUR POTTERSMAN

THE first time the public ever heard his work was when a naked dancer at the *Folies-Bergère* put on a jazz waltz he'd written. "I managed it by devious pressures," he says. "I knew the naked dancer."

And some time soon William Sansom, well-known to *Argosy* readers and the world for his brilliant short stories, hopes to see his first-ever musical reach the stage.

"It took *West Side Story* four years to reach the stage. It may take eight for me."

It may indeed. This musical—as yet untitled—is a most un-chocolate-box-like saga of mid-Victorian night-life. "It was the hottest," says Sansom, who has a deep social conscience. "Crinolines were thought to be so pretty-pretty, but there were 80,000 prostitutes in Piccadilly."

His partner in the musical is composer Jeffry Wright, whose best-known pop song is *Transatlantic Lullaby*. But he has been writing music mainly for revues since the 1930s.

Says Sansom, "We spent a year on the musical, on and off. My work would be interrupted when I had a quick thought for a story which wouldn't take too long. Writing

the musical wasn't frustrating—that comes later on, when you have to deal with all the other people who come into the picture: the theatre-owner, the director, and so on."

Surprisingly, to his vast and enthusiastic band of readers, this will represent a long-sought achievement for Sansom, now fifty-four years old. Before the war he would play the piano in jazz- and night-clubs on the occasional evening. Seven years ago he even had a pop song running in the Top Ten for a week.

"It was called *The Honeymoon Song*, theme tune of a film called *Honeymoon*," says Sansom. "It took me four hours to write the lyric—and the money I've made from that!"

All this seemed out of character, as William Sansom told it to me, for this is the man the critics describe as "a short-story writer by birth, addiction, and destiny." But as we sat together and talked in his beautiful house in St. John's Wood, London—writers Kingsley Amis and Stephen Potter are near neighbours—I realised that in fact it's all part of the elegant, cheery, cultivated character of the man.

His father was a naval architect who designed ships for the Tsars of Russia and the Kings of Spain. He was also a Sunday painter, and, says Sansom: "I was born with an aptitude for drawing—I was doing it quite well when I was four years old. I think, to be able to draw you've got to have a very keen eye for looking at things. I was always creative. At eight and nine and ten I was writing little short stories.

"I've still got some of them. The bug was always there, to do something about writing or drawing, and eventually it came to music too.

"I was an only child, a moderately lonely child. I got to spending a lot of time alone. I don't mean I had a dolorous childhood, but if you add up all the hours I spent alone, it comes to more than most children do.

"I still paint, for fun. I've never worked at it or studied it. I paint in a very naive manner."

Sansom keeps a drawing-pad by his writing-desk, and takes the odd hour off. Once or twice he has turned it to good account with nonsense-type efforts like the *Get-well-quick Colouring Book* for bored executives.

As a writer, his short stories show the keen eye. His conversation reveals the meticulous craftsman: "I work every day. To me, the only way is to provide a framework of discipline. I have the job of being both slave and master. I drive myself to it.

"I start at about ten in the morning, and work through to one-thirty. In actual creative writing this might yield a thousand words. Then the afternoons are taken up by all the business that a writer has to do—selling stuff, correcting proofs, making notes for the next day. A certain amount of study is necessary."

William Sansom believes that the chief problem with fiction is not content, but style: "How to put it freshly, how to freshen up your prose, yet keep it classically acceptable. The best way is to read a few pages of good stuff. There's a good deal of the parrot in me. I dip into an anthology of ancient Greek poetry or, for a bit of fire, Dylan Thomas' prose."

He has written a couple of novels—but doesn't like doing them: "They are more difficult than short things. I like to get het up by what I write. A short story of normal length takes me two to three weeks. I'm in it all the time. A novel once took me four years . . . a beast, it was. And you are with the same people then, every day of your life. It's unnatural. It's like owning a boarding-house—you're always seeing the same people.

"I always did write to amuse myself. I've no literary training. I never went to an English university, though I did go to Bonn to learn German; but that wasn't a proper university. People think a writer necessarily knows all about literature. I don't at all. I know about those I've selected to help me, but you could floor me in six questions."

His earliest short stories, written when a boy, in a way exemplify his sense of fun and craftsmanship—the two virtues that shine strongest in William Sansom's work. They were full of horror, blood, and murky murders—ghoulish stories.

"I still have one curious manuscript that begins breezily as a tale of some terrible Chinaman torturing a Spanish detective, and then the Spaniard begins to talk, and there follow pages and pages of Spanish dialogue carefully copied out of a phrase-book. This must finally have become tiresome, and suddenly breaks off, never to end."

He still went on writing a bit, after going to work at an Anglo-German bank in the City. He spent four years there, all the time "infected by the musical theatre. I wanted to write songs, music, sketches. None of them ever came to anything."

Instead he wrote letters—with his mind oomp-boomping away—to such people as Sir Basil Zaharoff about Wiggins Teape's profits for 1932 and Peruvian Tramways' shares.

"By the time I was twenty-three, it seemed obvious that I had no interest whatsoever in banking. My aptitude was for writing, and I joined an advertising agency in London. I worked very hard, and got a good job there—a managerial position directing programmes on Radio Luxembourg, dramatising a Fu Manchu series, and so on.

"It *was* a lot of hard work, and I don't suppose I did much writing of my own at that time. Then I got very clever, and thought I knew the formula for everything. I tried to write many stories, of the *Saturday Evening Post* type . . . sent them all out . . . and they all came back.

"Then the war came, and I really started to write. I was growing older, wiser. I wrote exactly what I thought about a particular incident—and that was a turning point. The story, *The Wall,* was accepted by the magazine *Horizon.*"

This tale came directly out of Sansom's war service. He had joined the Fire Service as a volunteer, and was spending the war in the Hampstead High School for Girls—"The old joke came true. We slept in the classrooms where the bells were marked RING FOR A MISTRESS."

Other firemen whiled away the hours with ping-pong. Not Sansom. He started the habit of a second lifetime, and worked really hard. The result was *The Wall*—about three fire-fighters who were framed by the windows of a factory wall as it keeled over: "I never stopped from that moment. I wrote like a steam engine.

"Yes, writing does come easy to me. When I start to read it, and start correcting, it looks like something written by a seventeen-year-old, with the most extraordinary clichés. Writing is, in fact, a way of letting it all come out, then I cut it about, sculpt it. To get this damn prose thing . . . that's the real hard work.

"What I find awfully interesting about writing is the way you map out first, roughly, what's going to happen, but what you actually write, page by page, seems to happen from nowhere—things you simply have not thought about before. It's as if you leave the room where you're sitting, and enter into the page where the story is; you actually inhabit the thing . . . I'm always amazed."

The sources for his stories—the new collection *The Ulcerated Milkman* has terrific range, from cockney window cleaners and soap-opera stars to the rustic argot of Ould Ireland—are say, ten per cent pub conversations, ninety per cent experience.

"Doctors and sailors have got something to tell you all the

time. But chiefly, it's just extending your experience so that you know what it's like going over the top of something when you haven't done it yourself. I could write about murder because I've been angry enough almost to kill, but I don't know enough about what happens afterwards, so I wouldn't dare write about *that.*

"I'm getting increasingly fond of humour. It's something to do with my kind of middle-age. I have begun to see life as something that can be laughed at. Although it's serious enough, it's not to be taken too seriously in the end. If ever I catch anyone reading any of my work, I love to hear their sudden laugh. I enjoy laughing; I like jollity and wit."

That's not to say there isn't a serious side to William Sansom, too. He has a social conscience, he *does* care—and not just about the night-life of mid-Victorian London.

He has a story in this new collection, *The Ulcerated Milkman,* called *Old Man Alone,* which he calls "a story that came from the human heart, in a fury against bad conditions." This is a powerful little tale about an old man who falls over in his lonely flat, and has to lie waiting for help.

Says Sansom of his politics: "I was on the Left, but the world has become so complex. The simplest thought is bound to have repercussions, and if you're not right in the middle of doing something, I don't see how you can have an opinion."

As a writer, William Sansom considers that the cinema is the most formative influence on novelists today—his own story *The Last Hours of Sandra Lee* was recently turned into *The Wild Affair.* "It's a great freer"—and he doesn't mean because of the money film companies hand out—"the camera is able to speak from any angle, and whereas previously, on the Jamesian principle, it was the central character through whose eyes everything was seen, now we can write all over the place.

"I'm a painter *manqué.* A lot of my stuff is extremely visual... I agree you can't take many films seriously, but I do like bad ones. I find myself crying at them—the trick works."

William Sansom was in his forties when he married for the first time. "I'd been in love several times, then *bang! comes* this war. I didn't feel like marrying in the middle of all that, and then, as my writing got successful, I became very one-track about it. I was never a confirmed bachelor, just—marriage wasn't necessary. I had no ambition for children—it was this old corny thing that if you're a creative artist, the

stuff you do is your child. And then one is terrified of being trapped. I remember just when I was beginning to write I met a (nameless) writer. I visited him one night in his small flat. There he was, married with one child, sitting in a room strung with nappies and that smelled like a laundry, correcting proofs. The proofs looked like nappies, too. The poor devil . . . it was horrifying.

"Why did I marry in the end? I fell in love." His lovely blonde wife, Ruth, used to be an actress. "I did have a long love affair before, but when you're over forty, you come round to the thought of being more settled and that kind of thing. I remember saying to myself—Why not do it?"

He seems pretty well domesticated now: a large, three-storeyed Edwardian house—William Sansom eliminates one lot of worries by keeping a pair of spectacles on each floor!—furnished with a great number of elegant old pieces, and liberally decorated with antique-shop curios, pieces of porcelain, shells from the South Seas, even some bronzes that his father once brought home from Petrograd. A delicate-looking ironwork staircase leads down to the large and slightly wild garden, in which he particularly admires the castor plant that flowers in November, and on which bluebottles get drunk.

Sansom himself works in a converted billiard room. "If this room had been two inches larger, my rival for the house would have bought it instead of me."

He says with resignation: "I'm not allowed China tea because it's too much trouble for my wife, and the rest of the family prefer Indian tea. I'm all for an easy life . . . My wife is much better socially than I am with people whom I wouldn't normally meet or effectively get hold of. She has a part-time job as scout for Italian and German publishers. That's good for a woman of ability. It's something constructive. She'd hate the idea of just being a housewife. She's used to having something of her own."

I asked him, finally, about his religious beliefs. "I'm an atheist. I see that you've got to help people in trouble, but to conceive that life has any meaning is the most overweening, overproud thing that the human brain can manage. It's an insult to the universe. I walk out three paces into the garden, and I see my foot crushing an insect for no reason at all. Seeds are blown on to a piece of tarmac where they never find earth to take life in. All sorts of arbitrary things happen all the time. Why should we parcel ourselves out as being something special!"

BY ANN DRYSDALE

The Shaggiest Shaggy Dog . . .

SHE was the largest woman the station sergeant had ever seen. The two officers accompanying her had to slew sideways to steer her through the door, and when she stood blinking in the light, staring through him, he got a sudden mental image of how she would look undressed. Two one-eyed hedgehogs peering over a precipice . . .

He had to drop his ballpoint and duck behind the desk and when he emerged they had steered her past into the interviewing room. As her rear view quivered through the glass-panelled door, he was irresistibly put in mind of two urchins fighting under a collapsed tent. Her voice was complaining now, muffled through wood and glass—"They have woollen underwear, officer, and twice a year they change . . . Who do? Why, *shepherds*."

Pog watched through the leaded window of his study as his wife came up the path. With the dignity of a Thames barge she unloaded herself of parcels and a lumpy string bag, took off her driving gauntlets and thrust her key into the door with the unerring accuracy of a woman used to finding things where she left them. Pog could have left the window to help her, but he was lost for a moment in the sight of his wife through the small panes—Georgina all cut into tiny diamonds . . . She dressed as though for driving in an open landau rather than a Ford Popular, and she was divesting herself of large helpings of leather in the hall when Pog bade her goodbye and slipped out. On Saturday mornings she took the car the half-mile to

the shops, and at lunchtime he took it the same half-mile to The Crossed Gunbàrrels.

It was that car that gave Pog his name. The regulars at the Barrels used to remark how the old damp-biscuit-coloured banger suited his personality, and called him by its registration letters.

Pog was a good husband, as they go, and would doubtless have made an indulgent father, had the opportunity arisen. Something of a Cinderella, he was a trifle more dependent on his fairy godbottle than Georgina realised, but even this never to excess.

The deference paid him in the Gents' Smoke was a gentle mockery too subtle to cause him pain and he smiled at the faces feet above the bottoms, inches above the stools which scraped aside to let him pass. He ordered a half.

As he stepped forward to drop a handful of small change on to the bar he trod on the paw of a large dog, which accepted his apology affably and with dignity. It did not move.

It was an Alsatian. A full-grown dog whose brown eyes surveyed Pog with an understanding pity that he mistook for respect. He transferred his brimming glass to his left hand and offered his right, gingerly, to the tawny beast. It licked off the froth that had spilled on the back of his knuckles. Pog smiled, and the dog's owner, with a knowing glance at his cronies, moved in for the kill, talking fast.

Pog left The Crossed Gunbarrels with four pints under his belt—all of which he had paid for himself—an Alsatian dog on a length of chain, and an empty feeling, which had spread from his pocketbook to the pit of his stomach at the thought of Georgina.

At home, Georgina was lavishing cream on her furniture. She loved it, and it was all undeniably beautiful. She mopped with a piece of cotton wool at the inlay on the Hepplewhite chairs—she called them "Hepplethwaite" with such an air of authority that her visitors never contradicted her, with the result that she continued to do so. Alone with her beautiful furniture she was a tragic, if gargantuan, figure and when her fat, blunt fingers paused for a moment to linger on the cherished surfaces, there was, perhaps, a little poetry.

When Georgina saw the dog, there was fear in her eyes—fear for the Persian carpet, the Regency table and the "Hepplethwaite" chairs, but Pog misread it entirely and said, "He won't bite." The dog growled a little at Georgina,

though, and she shouted suggestions as to what Pog should do with the animal and with himself, as he took the creature to his study and there closeted it, returning, shoulders braced, for the fray.

"No dear, not an Alsatian, a German Shepherd Dog." He began to repeat the sales-talk, parrot-fashion. "They were brought here after World War One, and the breeders feared to acknowledge their origins so soon after the Kaiser and all that. It was they who called them wolf-dogs instead, but really they're a gentle breed. And did you see that coat? It's a double layer you know; wool underneath and hair on top, that's why he feels so—so . . ." If only Pog had left it there, perhaps Georgina would have understood—equated the feel of deep fur with that of polished mahogany, but, being Pog, he had to have his little joke. "Like woollen underwear," he said.

Georgina retired, tight-lipped, to her front room.

But eventually, after several uncomfortable days, Pog miraculously had his way, for Georgina caught the dog in the front room and when her mouth opened to order him out, it stayed open for several moments, soundlessly. He was lying in a patch of sunlight that puddled the Persian carpet, his tawny coat turned to pure gold and his eyes to great balls of Jerusalem amber. The room took on an air of completeness and Georgina could only mutter to herself how well he went with the furniture. They decided that he should be called Aristotle.

Georgina would invite him, from time to time, to lie in the front room and he would fold himself on the carpet and she would sit and look at him, enraptured. But he was Pog's dog. The pity in the sucked-brandy-ball eyes still showed, sometimes underlined with a faint dog-smirk, but when the story of "how old Pog was sold a pup" had played itself out in the Gents' Smoke, Pog and Aristotle became genuinely respected customers.

An idyll, no less. Georgina was happy, Pog was happy, and Aristotle seemed content, dividing his waking hours between posing for Georgina and obeying Pog's tentative commands with manifest good humour.

Until the spring. Then, when Georgina entered her sanctum, she saw Aristotle lying in his accustomed place, but surrounded by a greyish, undulating film which spread outwards from him, all over the carpet. She summoned Pog, and together they stared.

"Moulting," said Pog. "Changing his woollen underwear. He does that twice a year." He and Aristotle judiciously went for a walk.

Georgina tried the carpet sweeper, the vacuum, the yard broom, but the fine hairs only gathered into little pills and flabby sausages that refused to part from the carpet. With tears of rage, she knelt thumpingly down and picked them off with her fingers. When Pog came back she said that Aristotle must go. But somehow, by keeping Aristotle in his study until the leakage stopped, he managed to steer a twisty course between her rages and, the storm weathered, Aristotle stayed. He stayed, with twice-yearly threats of the lethal chamber, for seven years.

Pog died peacefully at home just after the seventh Christmas. Georgina had been told to expect it and was relieved, having cherished a secret fear that he might pass on in the Barrels. After his passing, Aristotle became suddenly old, aloof and distant, preferring the spot beside Pog's old armchair in the study to his place on the Persian carpet. Georgina found him lying there a few weeks later, in an attitude of satisfied sleep, quite dead.

She contacted a taxidermist at once and within a short while Aristotle was back, in perpetual amber-eyed serenity, in the front room—a delight to the eye, like the old days.

Spring came. Georgina still took the old car down to the shops, all in leather, and returned to sit in the front room. On that particular Saturday she opened the front door and entered her room to see Aristotle looking up at her, dog-smirking, from a pall, a veritable ocean, of greyish hairs. They spread across the carpet, peppering every inch, undulating in the spring sunshine.

Georgina slammed the door. Other women might have turned to a medium or a priest, but Georgina was a realist. She put on her ex-Ministry flying jacket and gauntlets and drove to the police station.

The electric light in the police station paled the spring sun into unreality and Georgina felt vaguely at a disadvantage, but her voice took on a firm note and she continued bravely. "*German* shepherds. They have woollen underwear, you see . . ."

Drunk, thought the station sergeant, still listening half-earedly. But it was the wrong time of day.

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JOHNNY RAW

BY DONALD R. MORRIS

PRIVATE Peter Dawson, who was serving as orderly, was standing right beside him when the stray shot wounded Lieutenant Mottis-Seton. The officer had clambered on to a large boulder to watch his platoon charge down on the small kraal, and one of the retiring Zulus, an old man, had fired at him.

He missed—they almost always did—but the bullet struck a rock near the boulder, and a stone chip had smashed into the officer's cheekbone and lodged somewhere in his nasal passages.

Lieutenant Mottis-Seton had dropped his sword, clapped his hands over his face, spun around and slipped awkwardly off his perch. Dawson distinctly heard his thigh snap as he landed.

Dawson was horrified. He was nineteen years old, he had been in the Army less than a year, and this was the first time he had seen a man seriously injured.

A moment earlier, he had been watching the rest of the patrol, bayonets fixed, running in a ragged line towards the beehive huts, while a few

'You'll never do—sing out for help, that's about all you're good for'

Zulu women and the old man were scampering for the safety of the bush beyond a small stream. Then the old man raised his rifle. There had been a cottony puff of smoke—although Dawson could not remember hearing either the report or the whine of the bullet. Now the lieutenant was stretched on the ground, kicking his sound leg and making bubbling noises behind his hands.

Nothing in Dawson's sketchy training had prepared him for this. He put down his rifle and stared stupidly. To leave the lieutenant and run after the others did not seem quite right, but Dawson had no desire to pull those hands away from that face, nor would he have known what to do next had he done so.

He wanted desperately to be a good soldier—it was all he had ever wanted in his young life—but there were so many times he did not know what to do, and Sergeant Hackett's patience was beginning to wear thin. Finally, he faced back to the kraal and began to shout. "Hi! Sergeant Hackett! Ventris, Corporal Ventris! Up here! Help!"

The platoon had started to fire the huts, and several of the red-coated figures, clear of the crackling noise of the flames, turned to stare back up the slope. A tall figure with a revolver shaded his eyes and broke into a sudden run. He yelled something over his shoulder, and two or three others started after him.

It was a steep slope, and Sergeant Hackett was breathing hard when he reached the top, well before the others. Ignoring Dawson, he stuffed his revolver into his holster and dropped to his knees beside the lieutenant, who had stopped kicking his leg and was lying quietly, rocking his head from side to side. Hackett pulled the officer's hands away gently, inspected him briefly and then set to work.

Twenty minutes later, he was finished. The lieutenant's appearance was alarming—the bridge of his nose was smashed, both eyes had shut, and he was breathing hoarsely through his mouth and he could not talk intelligibly—but the entrance wound was small and had stopped bleeding. Hackett had applied the Army's sovereign remedy for bullet wounds, a cold-water compress, and had then set the fractured thigh and splinted it with the lieutenant's scabbard. Then he sent two men from the reassembled platoon down to search the ruins of the kraal for two poles and a Zulu blanket. A few moments later, Mottis-Seton was resting on a litter and they were all on their way back to the outpost at Winckler's Drift

on the Ityanka River, three miles to the south. Only then did Hackett speak to Dawson.

"All right, boy, what the hell happened?"

Miserably, Dawson told him. They had been standing there. The old man had fired. The lieutenant had fallen. He had called for help. That was all.

The sergeant was silent for a moment or two, and his voice was hard when he finally spoke. "You'll never do, Dawson, you just won't learn. Whenever the pinch is on, you freeze tight. Big pinch or little, you won't move. Sing out for help, that's all you're good for."

"That's not fair! There wasn't time to do anything!"

"You might have caught him when he fell. You could have started to help him. If that had been a proper bullet, he'd have bled to death before I got there. You might at least have tried a shot at the Zulu, instead of putting your Martini down and picking your nose until I got there. This isn't Aldershot, man, it's field service in Zululand."

The boy was silent.

"Dawson, I'd hoped to make a soldier out of you. You come from decent folk, you read and write and cipher. You don't drink, you keep clean and you do what you're told. You get along with the others. That's more than enough to make you a sergeant, and with any luck, you might even have stretched your legs under an officers' mess table some fine day. But you just won't move. I've tried for a year, and there's no use to it. Take my advice, go back to civvy street when your hitch is out. You'll never do in the Army."

Since Hackett was an eminently fair sergeant and his summary was basically true, Dawson made no reply. He *did* secretly hope for a commission in the fullness of time; he had never been fool enough to voice such a wild ambition, but he sensed that Hackett was somehow aware of his hope and, far from deriding it, actually approved.

Hackett had always treated him strictly but justly, making no more concessions to him than he would have made to any other recruit, but from the first, he had always seemed to expect more of him than from the others. Tommy Atkins was generally not expected to do anything at all until someone told him to do it; initiative in the ranks was rarely a virtue and usually led to trouble. In many small ways, however, Hackett seemed to expect it of Dawson, and he was disappointed when it was not forthcoming.

Dawson, aware that he was young and inexperienced, could accept that disappointment as a Johnny Raw, but to find it voiced so bluntly in the field cut him deeply. It hit for the first time at his own self-confidence, and if Hackett would no longer accept his caution as a manifestation of youth and inexperience, it meant that he felt the defect was inherent. It would be pointless then to dream of a soldier's career, and Dawson was now truly troubled.

They were back at Winckler's Drift by early afternoon, and the men dispersed to clean their accoutrements and to boil tea. Hackett emerged from the officer's tent after he had supervised the lieutenant's transfer to his camp bed. Mottis-Seton was asleep—or perhaps unconscious; it was hard to tell—and Hackett did not know what to do with him. He stared moodily at the earthen entrenchment that formed a ditch; the breast-high wall around the four bell tents the men slept in; the enormous pile of tarpaulin-covered mealie bags and biscuit crates and considered the situation.

Mottis-Seton had been left with forty men from H Company to guard the supply dump when the main force moved south to strike into Zululand on the Ulundi track, and the medical officer was fifty miles behind at Landman's Drift. The dump was not on the main track, but off to the north, a minor cache of supplies in case a detached force had to operate in the neighbourhood. None of the constant traffic between the head of the column, now deep into Zululand, and the base at Landman's Drift passed through the outpost at Winckler's Drift. There were no major Zulu impis in the vicinity, and they were reasonably safe as long as they stuck to their little fortification. But the region swarmed with small parties of Zulu who lived in still-unpacified kraals like the one they had burnt that morning, and solitary travellers were in some danger.

Mottis-Seton obviously needed professional attention, but Hackett doubted that any of the overworked surgeons at Landman's Drift could be induced to ride a hundred miles for the sake of a single man who might be in some pain and acute discomfort, but who was hardly in mortal danger. Mottis-Seton could neither ride nor walk, and the long trip over stony ground in the springless, two-wheeled cart—all the Transport Service had left at the Drift—would surely kill him. The worst of it was that Mottis-Seton had been the only officer with the detachment. Sergeant Hackett was now in acting command, and there was no-one to whom he could turn.

There was at least Challis, a settler who farmed several

thousand acres a few miles up the Ityanka. He had been in Natal for twenty years, and he belonged to the Ityanka Mounted Rifles, who had been called out with the other volunteers' corps when the campaign started. Challis was allegedly a corporal, but Hackett winced every time he saw his wrinkled uniform of stained corduroy and his battered slouch hat with the red pugree. He was, in fact, such an utter civilian that Hackett could just overlook his chevrons and talk to him, man to man.

"Look here, Challis," he started. "You know this blasted country. How the hell do I get young Seton to a doctor?"

Challis, the only mounted man at the outpost, had been sewing a torn saddle flap. He rose to his feet and considered.

"I don't rightly know. Unless you carry him."

"Don't talk rot. It's fifty miles."

Challis raised his eyebrows. "I wasn't thinking of Landman's Drift. Fort Newdigate's more like it," he answered, naming a major depot the column had left in its track as it advanced towards Ulundi.

"That's even farther, for God's sake. I just looked at Seton's map, and it's sixty miles if it's an inch."

"It's nothing like it," Challis snorted. "The sapper who drew that map of yours never stuck his nose north of the Tugela River. All he ever did was talk to Dutch traders who'd been through with a wagon, and they measure distance in time, not miles. That's bad ground for a wagon, and they simply said "longer." Fort Newdigate's on the bluff by the Mahlenza Gorge on the Ityotyosi, isn't it? Well, you can see the Mahlenza slopes from the ridge over the Drift; it's not twenty miles from here."

Hackett thought for a moment. Challis was right; the maps weren't any damned good, and he *did* know the country. There'd be surgeons at Fort Newdigate, and proper ambulance wagons to boot. He went on to the next point.

"Carry him?"

"If you knock a proper litter together, a camp bed slung from a good padded shoulder-pole, you can put four men on him, two fore and two aft. Four reliefs and a squad for the escort. Why, if you leave here at first light and hump it, you can get him in there by sundown, easy."

"Sixteen men is going on half the force. I can't spare it."

Challis shrugged. "Forget the escort. You can spare a squad."

"They couldn't carry a litter twenty miles."

Challis laughed. "You marched those poor clots twenty miles a day on the way up, with sixty pounds on their sorry, sweating backs—not to mention their water, rations, firewood or eighty rounds of ammo. *And* a Martini. Leave all that gear here, give 'em a haversack with a bit of biltong and some crackers and maybe a dozen rounds. That's the way the Dutch travel. Hell, you'd be doing 'em a favour. A quarter of Seton comes to a lot less than their usual load."

"And the Zulus?"

"Well, now. There's a couple of small kraals between here and the Ityotyosi, but almost all the young bucks are back at Ulundi. Maybe a few odd lots are still at home, getting over wounds or resting up from the Isandhlwana scrap. I don't think it's too dicey, but it's hard cheese both ways. You're not going to hold out here overlong if you're jumped in this rock garden, either. Tell you what, I'll slog myself. We can load eight 'tinis and an ammo crate on old Nellie here. We can even hang a waterbag on her; she's done duty as a pack horse before. Nine of us on open ground in daylight aren't liable to meet more Zulus than we can handle, and if there's a fight, the noise'll bring a recce out from Newdigate."

It wasn't a good solution, but it had one prime virtue: it was the only solution.

The patrol set out long before sun-up the next morning, as the first grey light began to seep through the chill mist. Dawson was on the first shift to carry the litter. He had hardly dared hope that he would be chosen after what had happened the day before, but with every man volunteering, Hackett had simply taken the first squad, probably because Ventris was the best of the corporals.

They had cut a solid pole from the dissel-boom of the useless cart, with a hanging bed formed from the cart sail, and the lieutenant, his leg resplinted and his swollen face covered with a fresh compress, swung easily from their shoulders.

Ventris led the unit, with the litter bearers behind him and Challis bringing up the rear with Nellie. The four reliefs took their rifles and moved out several hundred yards, two to a side. They kept station on the litter, scouting the shallow dongas that seamed the rolling plain.

Ventris led with care, searching out good footing and making for the distant notch that Challis claimed marked the Mahlenza Gorge. The corporal's eyes roved the empty plain, and he referred frequently to a battered hunter watch, timing exact

five-minute halts before changing the bearers every hour. He refrained from urging them on, aware that it would only slow them in the end, and he announced that they would keep moving steadily, with a half-hour break at noon. None of them had any desire to be caught in the Mahlenza Hills in the dark with their burden.

The first changes went smoothly. By eleven o'clock, they were in the broad mouth of an almost imperceptible valley that led up to the Mahlenza foothills, still more than five miles ahead. It was bounded to their left by a long, low spur that trailed out from the range, forming a slowly rising ridge that blocked their view of the country to the north.

Once, far to the south, Dawson saw a single Zulu warrior trotting along. He carried a white-splashed black shield, and every now and again the sun glinted on the assagai blades he clutched behind the shield. He was well ahead of them, drawing away and moving more to the south than they were.

"Forget him," Challis said. "Just a young buck. He was probably hit at Isandhlwana, and now he's catching up with his mob at Ulundi."

"Won't he report us?" Ventris asked.

"Hell, no. He knows the country's alive with redcoats; he'll see lots more before he gets to Ulundi. We may see more Zulus moving in the same direction; they'll cross the Ityotyosi well clear of Fort Newdigate. All we have to worry about is big groups behind us and to the north, over to the left. There's three or four big kraals up where I farm, and they might be sending two or three hundred men to Ulundi in fair-sized driblets. A group like that, now, moving along behind the ridge—they could give us trouble if they spot us."

Challis was growing visibly uneasy, and he had more or less taken over the lead from Ventris. He picked a zigzag course through the best of the grass, avoiding the bare patches, and he kept turning to stare at the hot, still vault of blue behind them.

By the noon halt, they were well into the narrowing valley. The ridge to the north was steeper, with a serrated razor-back of rock, broken by long, grassy mounds. The men threw themselves down gratefully, pulling biscuits and strips of biltong from their haversacks.

Wragby took off his boot and inspected a blistered heel, complaining softly while he poked at it with a grimy forefinger. No-one paid him any heed. Ventris inspected the lieutenant's dressings, wetting the compress and murmuring a word or two

of encouragement before giving the officer a sip of water. Then the corporal squatted down for his own meal so that his short shadow fell on the lieutenant's bandaged face.

Nellie was grazing, and Challis stood beside her, still staring off to the north at the sky beyond the ridge. "I don't like it," he announced finally.

"Where? What's up?" Ventris rose at once. The others stopped eating.

"Looks like dust. Hard to say, rightly. There's a stream in that valley, and the grass is pretty rank; I've grazed cattle on it. There wouldn't be much dust to begin with, and it could be haze, but it seems to stop about even with us."

Dawson shaded his eyes, staring with the others. It was hard to make out anything in the glare, but the sky behind did seem a lighter shade than the clear blue ahead.

"I'd better send someone for a look-see," Ventris said.

"I'll go, Corporal," Dawson broke in.

Ventris looked doubtful.

"Please. I've got the best eyes in the Company."

"All right. But up and down and get back fast. I want to move on."

Dawson turned to go, but Challis called him back. "Half a minute, there. Take your damned helmet off; that regimental badge is worse than a heliograph. And you'd better ditch your jacket, too. A grey under-shirt's the ticket."

Dawson pulled off his helmet and began to unbutton his red tunic.

"Look slippy up there, and for God's sake don't show your head," Challis went on. "Pick a good clump of grass near the end of that mound there, get on your belly and crawl in slowly. It might not be anything, and even if it is dust, it could be cattle or just some game, zebra or wildebeeste. But we've been kicking up dust ourselves, and if it is a party of bucks, they may have seen it."

Dawson nodded and turned to Ventris. "Can I have my 'tini?"

"Hell, no. If it *is* Zulus, I don't want you shooting. Just get back out of the grass and wave, up and down for trouble and across for clear. You've got a knife, haven't you?"

"Bought it in Durban." Dawson patted the sheath knife thrust into his waistband.

"All right, off you go."

He started out. The ground was level for a quarter of a mile, and he covered it at a fast trot, slowing as the slope rose

and then steepened. The ridge was strewn with boulders, and once or twice he had to scramble, but beyond the rocks lay a long, sharp, grassy mound that formed the skyline. Dawson crouched, caught his breath and then began to sidle towards a prominent hummock to his right.

He looked back. The plain behind him was empty, except for the patrol a half-mile away. Ventris and Challis were standing beside Nellie, watching him, and the others had resumed their meal.

The grass was a yard high and more, and Dawson began to worm his way into the growth. He inched forward, his ears filled with the dry crackle of his progress.

The hummock rose to a final ridge, and Dawson sensed rather than saw that he had reached the skyline. The ground ahead dropped sharply. He stretched forward, cautiously reached out his arms and carefully parted a final tuft of grass. Then he almost screamed, pinching his terror off in a short, shrill gasp. A contorted Zulu face had risen from the grass, inches away from his own.

For an endless moment, neither man moved. Dawson was rigid with a great crushing fear that descended on him like a landslide, clamping every muscle in an iron vice. Every detail of the face before him lanced into his numbed brain.

The dark-brown features were young, no older than his own, and they were beaded with sweat. The mouth was open, exposing strong, white teeth and a pink, motionless tongue. The hard, black eyes, surrounded by clear whites, were rigidly fixed upon him. A snuff-box made from the tip of a cow-horn was thrust through a pierced ear-lobe; a smear of dust was on the chin and a long stalk of grass was caught in the tightly curled hair.

As the first tingling shock passed, Dawson felt half-formed, chaotic thoughts begin to burgeon and, after a moment, they began to fit together.

The first of them concerned the expression on the Zulu's face. It was a sheer terror that fully matched his own. There was no question of it—the man was frozen, too. And in the shelter of that knowledge, Dawson's own terror began to ebb.

He tore his eyes away for an instant, glancing past the muscular shoulder hunched under the face. Even as his gaze locked on the Zulu's again, the knowledge of what had happened was firm. There was indeed a stream in the valley to the north of the ridge, and a party of well over a hundred

Zulu warriors was resting by its bank, half a mile away. They had also seen dust, and the Zulu youth had come to the skyline on exactly the same mission as Dawson.

Even as he assimilated the fact, the Zulu's eyes flicked, and Dawson knew that his own patrol had been seen.

For a last fraction of a second, there was time to consider, but no matter what he did, it would be wrong. If he threw himself forward to fight, both parties would start for the ridge, and his patrol would unquestionably be annihilated. If he threw himself back and ran, the Zulu would alert his companions, and the end result, a little delayed, would be the same. It was a complete impasse, and there was nothing he could do about it. It was funny, really, and the travesty of a giggle, distorted and strangled, cracked the mask of his face.

To his amazement, the mask confronting him cracked as well. The face changed radically, mostly around the eyes. It was still contorted, but it was indubitably trying to smile, and Dawson suddenly realised that the very same thoughts had struck the Zulu. The last of the terror passed, and his tight grin widened. And all at once, they were both laughing. Almost touching, they put their heads down on the warm ground and laughed until the tears stood in their eyes.

Dawson pulled himself together suddenly, reached out and grabbed at the brown shoulder. He pulled back his other arm, laid a finger across his lips and made an elaborate shushing pantomime.

The Zulu was startled and tensed, but then he nodded vigorously and mimicked the gesture. He pointed past Dawson at the British patrol, then over his own shoulder towards the Zulus, frowned and shook his head. Dawson nodded.

It was all right. It was gloriously all right. Dawson had found a friend, and neither black Africa nor the British Army would ever seem the same again. They would have to part in a minute or two, and they would undoubtedly never meet again. It would be years before either of them could even tell the story of how they had met, but they would never forget each other. They lay there relaxed in the tall grass, grinning.

Dawson pointed to himself. "Daw-son."

"uDaw-son," the Zulu repeated. Then he pointed at himself. "Ma-qu-bu," he said. Dawson tried it, stumbling over the tongue click, and they laughed again.

Dawson pointed at the Zulus by the stream. "Ulundi?" he asked.

"Kwa-Ulundi," the Zulu affirmed.

Dawson nodded and indicated his own patrol. "Kwa-Ityotyosi," he ventured.

Maqubu understood, but a sudden thought troubled him. He pointed at the Zulus, made a walking sign with his fingers, and then pointed carefully at the Mahlenza Hills, indicating an area somewhat to the north of the notch towards which Challis was leading the British. Of course. He was afraid that the two parties might meet, after all.

Dawson considered it briefly. He pointed to the Zulus and made a rapid walking gesture, then at his own patrol and waggled his fingers slowly. Then he pointed at the notch. Maqubu understood at once. The Zulus would be crossing the Ityotyosi far to the north of Fort Newdigate, and they would not meet accidentally in the foothills.

It was time to go. There was so much to talk about, and it was all out of the question, of course. Dawson would have liked to know what the Zulu's life was like. Had he, too, dreamed of being a warrior, of commanding an impi some day? He must have been a Johnny Raw, too, and Dawson wondered what the lot of a Zulu recruit was like. He seemed a nice chap.

Dawson reached down to his waistband and tugged out his sheathed knife, offering it to Maqubu. The Zulu's eyes flashed and he reached for the gift, but then he hesitated, looking quizzically at Dawson.

Of course. How to explain the possession of such a gift? Dawson thought for a moment, and then tossed the knife into the grass beside them. He turned his head from side to side, as if searching idly, spotted the knife and made an expression of pleased surprise. Maqubu laughed and nodded and retrieved the present. Then, from behind him, he dragged forward a red cow-hide shield and three assagais. He selected an iKlwa, a short, stabbing spear with a broad, sharp blade, and flung it past Dawson with a practised sidearm toss. It stuck in the ground, quivering, and Dawson was glad he had not tried to fight. He reached out and clasped Maqubu's hand. "Goodbye, old man. Good luck."

"*Sala kahle,* uDaw-son," Maqubu replied.

They both inched backwards, and the grass sprang up and blotted them out.

Dawson plucked out the assagai and backed out of the grass. Still crouching, he looked down. The whole patrol had risen and was watching him. He made the all-clear sign, then ran down the slope.

Ventris came to meet him. "Well?"

"All clear. Must have been game."

"Where'd you get the assagai?"

"Found it in the grass. Isn't it a beauty?"

"Lost your knife."

"Even trade."

They set out again, and Dawson, hefting the assagai, moved out to scout the flank.

By late afternoon, they had reached the Ityotyosi. As the sun was sinking, they met a vedette of Ityanka Mounted Rifles, and an hour later, they were in camp and Mottis-Seton was in the hands of surgeons.

A staff colonel thanked them and told them they would go back the next day, with another officer and forty men. They ate their suppers and rested by a camp-fire, smoking a last pipe before turning in.

"Pity you can't stay at Newdigate," Ventris said to Dawson. "Hackett seems to have a down on you."

Dawson laughed, holding his assagai between his knees. "I don't mind. Besides, it won't last long. I'll still be a soldier when he's dead and buried."

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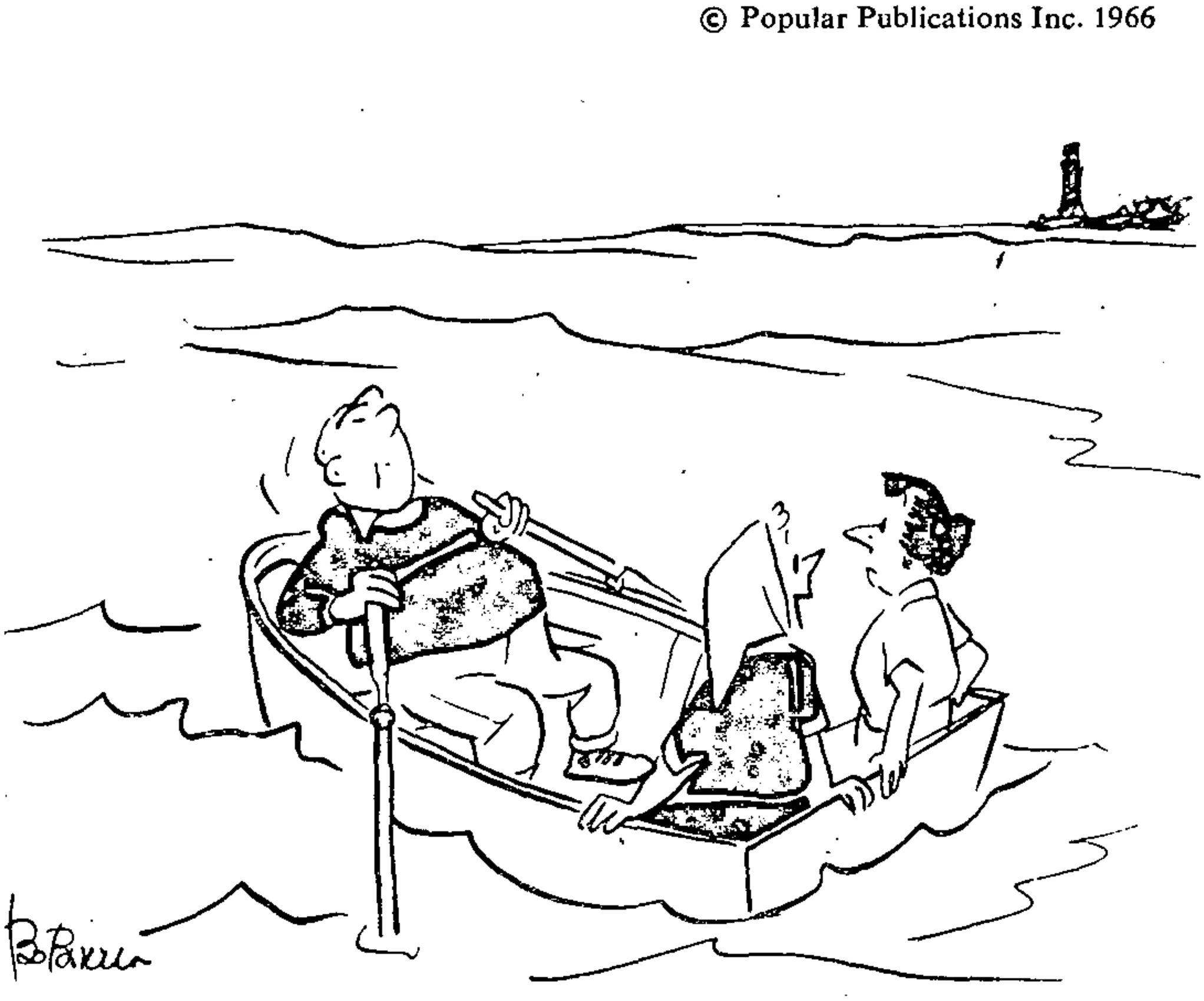

"The doctor told George to take a long ocean voyage!"

We would pause by the rusty gates and Father would point with his stick to an upstairs window . . .

Sunday Walk

By LEONE STEWART

IT was a tradition in our family instituted by my father—the Sunday afternoon walk in winter. I cannot recall its beginning nor yet its ending, for the walks stretched across the whole length of my childhood, like schooldays, rice-pudding and knots in my long hair. Monotonous regularity has a habit of diminishing memory, so that all those Sunday afternoons might have become cushioned together and faded, like an ageing print, to a blur on the backcloth of my mind, except for the incident of The House in the Moonlight.

In the family apart from my parents, there were my sister Jeanie and myself and our young brother, Tim. Jeanie was eleven and I was nearing ten and Tim lagged behind at four-and-a-half when the incident occurred.

Although our home was only semi-detached with three bedrooms, it had stretchability; young cousins and friends were always coming to stay and the house and dining table accommodated all, if not very comfortably. There were giggles in the bathroom, secrets exchanged in the loft, and the long narrow garden had in turn been a tennis court with a clothes-line acting as net, and a swimming-pool, uncemented, that had a habit of drying up in hot weather when it was most needed. We children had inadequately erected a swing, perilously roped to a sagging branch on the elm tree and, taking our lives in our hands, we would sail through the air on the wooden seat, kicking ourselves higher and higher with thumping hearts, the

thought of sudden death adding piquancy to the escapade.

My father, who was the dominant factor in the household, was a big man, big in stature and personality. He was generous to a fault, unconventional, unpredictable, and completely unafraid of anyone or anything.

He owned, across the years, a succession of cars, but since they all looked and acted exactly alike, there was no telling them apart. They were always the same make, my father believing in strict loyalty, and while they were politely referred to as "second-hand," that was an understatement. The cars were ancient two-seaters with springless dicky-seats where Jeanie and I would perch, being bumped and shaken on rough, stony roads, as my father drove with my mother and Tim on the front seat.

I doubt if it was only the cheapness of those sad, woebegone vehicles that attracted Father. More, I suspected, was that he could never do any appreciable speed in them; fifteen miles an hour was their limit, but they made so much noise, exuded so many fumes that to passers-by we gave the impression that we were soaring along.

The extra young people who filled our house from time to time were really a necessity, especially in winter. For without their able assistance every morning the tired, recalcitrant two-seater would not budge an inch. It was a case of first pushing it out of the garage and then, with all hands to the plough and my father sitting large and important at the steering-wheel, we would puff and blow and shove halfway down the avenue until the sluggish engine coughed slowly into life. Father would raise his hat in salute and then chug away, leaving a straggling row of children without enough breath between them to blow a mouth-organ.

In summer and at weekends the car was used for river picnics with the whole family and dog aboard, but in winter, Father deemed it necessary for his ancient motor to have a long rest before another harrowing week on the road began. So the winter walk was the order of every Sunday, and these five-mile tramps had to be undertaken stoically and without complaint. He had ways of softening the agony, so that we unwilling donkeys had both the whip and the carrot.

The wind could be screaming through the trees, the snow ankle-deep on the ground, the rain falling to drown all fresh-air seekers, but it made no difference. Only our mother and the car would be left behind at home to sleep, while the rest of the household set out, our dog Skipper leading the way with

sniffing interest and delighted enthusiasm not shared by us children.

We grumbled quietly to one another and Jeanie, who was a devoted bookworm and hated leaving whatever she was currently reading, used to vow each time: "I shall catch pneumonia and then he'll be sorry!"

She never did catch pneumonia and in fact we were all rather healthy, though this we would never attribute to those Spartan walks.

There was one particular route that my father favoured, across country and to the next village. We had to go through the cemetery gardens and we knew the tombstones off by heart and would compose our own for the future; Jeanie making hers rhyme, and always with the same ending: *Missed By All.*

Father would often pause and chat with people, both those he was acquainted with and those he wasn't. He believed the world would be a better place if the word "stranger" did not exist. *Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted* signs might not have been there for all the notice he took of them. He failed to see how, by crossing a field in a law-abiding fashion with his family and the dog strictly to heel, he was trespassing, and many a quiet argument he had with a farmer on this account; usually he won his point and, even if he didn't, we still continued to cross the land, careful to close all gates and not antagonise cattle. The outward journey would eventually bring us to Cadbury Lane and Mr. Hobbs' little greengrocery shop.

Mr. Hobbs seemed untroubled by any Shop Act, since he was always open on Sundays and appeared, like my father, to be a law unto himself. The electric-light bulb that hung from the centre of the ceiling would glow on pomegranates, fat red apples, tangerines in their half-covers of silver paper, William pears, great Jaffa oranges and luscious South African grapes. There were monkey nuts, boxes of dates and the deep yellow beauty of bananas. It was all this that had encouraged our dragging feet on the last mile of the journey—the oil-heated warmth of the small shop and Mr. Hobbs' beaming smile that told us to sample whatever we fancied.

For ten glorious minutes we would munch, spitting pomegranate seeds into our hankies and unzipping banana skins. My father, leaning on his walking stick, would only have a couple of black grapes himself, and after Skipper had finished his bowl of water and Mr. Hobbs totted up the bill, we would get ready to leave.

The bill always amounted to two-and-three, however many there were of us, or whatever we had managed to tuck away in those precious ten minutes. Then my father would toss a half-crown into the air and Mr. Hobbs would call heads or tails. If he won he received the threepence bonus, if he lost Father only handed over two shillings. It was a game they both appeared to enjoy playing.

Though we were in the shop for so short a time, it was always dark when we emerged—the winter sky mantling the countryside and hiding away the last lingering remains of the afternoon. Now frost would silver the pavements, or fresh snow fall to hinder our footsteps, and then my young brother would ride on Father's shoulders, while the rest of us fought to have a large arm to lean on.

It was story-time now and always the same story, interjected with fresh characters and situations, yet never failing to have as its centre pivot The House in the Moonlight.

The house was a real one and we would reach it on the way home.

Father made a point of leading us along the zigzagging Snaky Lane and then into the tree-canopied loneliness of Squirrel Walk. Once, we knew, great houses had lined the whole of the Walk but now they had all gone, save one that stood in isolation some distance back from the road, dark and sinister, its great gates rusty and its windows black and curtainless. In the story, of course, the house was haunted, for we would never have settled for less and we didn't object to having an extra shiver on that account. I even used to forget that my legs, between the tops of my stockings and the beginning of my navy knickers, were freezing, once my father had started on the story.

By the time we reached the house, which lent authenticity to the tale, we were usually shaking with fear—all except Tim, who by then would be fast asleep on Father's shoulders. We would pause by the rusty gates and Father would point with his stick to an upstairs window.

"The lonely traveller stopped here, just as we are doing now, and then he saw a face at the window and a beckoning finger . . ."

Jeanie would shout: "Oh, stop, Dad, stop it, I can't bear it!"

She loved every moment, of course, and would have considered him lacking in imagination if he hadn't managed to give her a genuine fright.

"It's only a story," I would remind her contemptuously and then I would urge Father on.

"The traveller pushed open the gates and went up the drive and when he reached the front door—"

"Yes, yes," I would squeal, although I could usually guess what was coming next, for I had heard it all dozens of times already.

Father would wait significantly and then continue in his most solemn voice: "The door, when the traveller reached it, opened very, very slowly on creaking hinges and as the man stepped gingerly into the ice-cold hall the *door swung to behind him!*"

My father would start walking again then and we'd be so excited that even the prospect of the warm living room, with tea on the table and the Sunday muffins running with butter and the fire leaping up the chimney, could not encourage us to hurry. We had to know what happened next...

The story never ended. We would reach our own front gate before Father could find a satisfactory answer to all the weird things that had happened; indeed, I think it would have been a personal nightmare for him to have been forced to extricate himself from such a situation. But he was quite safe. Next Sunday he would begin at the beginning and, with a few variations, keep us happy with the same ghost story.

On the afternoon of the incident nothing had gone right from the offset. There were no cousins or young friends staying in the house just then, and Tim had ear-acre, so he couldn't be taken for the usual walk. Jeanie was against going, too; she had locked herself in our bedroom with an exciting book, and though my father banged on the door and ordered her to come out, she flatly refused.

I said nothing, though surely for once, I thought, he would capitulate and not insist on going out. It was so cold that the very cabbages in the vegetable patch were stiff, and yet there was Father levering himself into his heavy overcoat and snapping the lead on Skipper. He looked at me. There was a large hole in one of my woollen gloves and I wondered if I dared make that an excuse for missing the walk. Mother had taken Tim upstairs to have a sleep with her and I stood first on one leg and then the other, longing for a reprieve. If left behind, I could curl up in the big chair before the fire and do some sketching or read *Black Beauty* again and have a good cry.

Horses were the passion of my life just then.

"Well, Judy," Father said, "are you coming with me or not?"

I had the alternative, it seemed, and that decided me. Of course I must go. It was such a long walk for someone to take alone. I put on my coat and changed from slippers to shoes and I folded over the wool in my glove so that he wouldn't see the hole.

The afternoon cold bit into my face, but we managed a fast trot and I hung on Father's arm. There were no people about; the whole world seemed deserted and I tried not to think of the fire at home and the deep, cushioned chair that could have been mine for two idle hours.

Father gave me a running commentary about the countryside, explaining the names of different berries and trees, yet I answered only feebly, my teeth chattering and my feet like two pieces of ice. When we reached Mr. Hobbs' shop it was in darkness, the shutters up and the word CLOSED prominently displayed on the door.

Father hesitated, glancing down at me. My disappointment was acute and must have showed clearly; I was thinking of that ten minutes' respite from the cold in the oil-heated warmth of the shop, and I had decided to have two oranges because I was so thirsty.

Father, in his unconventional way, seldom took any notice of a CLOSED sign. He would knock up a shopkeeper at any hour if he wanted service badly enough. He raised the knocker now and then he hesitated for a moment and very slowly replaced it.

"Perhaps not," he said to me. "I'm sorry, Judy, but if you remember, last Sunday Mr. Hobbs told us his wife was not well. Maybe we'll find a sweet shop open somewhere else."

I didn't want a sweet shop—I wanted to get home, for I couldn't remember ever having been as chilled as this in the whole of my life, and above my stockings my legs were chafed and raw.

We turned for home and Father took my arm and tucked it through his. I didn't even beg for the story, for I knew I should be unable to concentrate, and in any case it seemed an awful waste to tell it to me alone. I knew that had there been any kind of transport he would have taken it. Instead, he measured his steps to mine and we were both silent on that long trek home. He found a strong peppermint in his pocket

and popped it into my mouth. I did not care for strong peppermints as a rule, but I sucked it in the hope that it might make me feel warmer.

I had the mirage before me of the lighted living room and the hot, buttered muffins, but there seemed a desert of walking and freezing cold before such comfort could be realised. Skipper was tired, too, and stubbornly barked his protest, standing still and refusing to move.

Father gathered him up and tucked him under his coat and then we turned into Squirrel Walk and through the gaunt and leafless trees I saw the old house, with pale, watery moonlight torching over the weedy grounds and drive. Today we wouldn't pause. Father seemed as much in a hurry to be home as I was, and since there was no story we didn't need to linger by the gates, to add veracity to the tale. Another ten minutes, fifteen at the most, and we should be home, I thought, but to my utter astonishment Father had stopped by the rusty gates.

He was staring up the drive towards the house that had suddenly darkened as clouds crossed before the moon. He put down the dog and handed me the lead. "Wait there, that's a good girl."

Fear of something cold, clammy and alien burrowed into my being and though I opened my mouth to shout, to call him back, I could not utter a sound. My legs, too, had lost all power. They felt like roots in the ground so that I could not even run after him. I was alone in this lonely, tree-shrouded Walk, with just the last, dying echo of my father's footsteps on the gravel drive.

Skipper began to whine and tug on the lead. It was as if he, too, sensed something was wrong and that his master had walked away into some kind of danger.

I could never estimate how long I stood there, a trembling bundle of fear. It could have been a handful of minutes or half an hour, yet to me it was like a small eternity. I had the terrible feeling that I would never see my father again; that demon hands would grasp him up there at the house and never again would we have sight or sound of him. The traveller in the story had walked up the drive and gone into the house; though his fate we never knew, since the story was never concluded. The wind whispered around me menacingly and spots of icy rain began to fall.

Skipper saw my father first and started to give short, sharp barks; they sounded more like a censure than a welcome.

Father was running; he came through the gates and caught my hand and from then on he seemed to be half-carrying me home. I had no idea what we were running away from, though I did not doubt his wisdom, and if he considered it was imperative to move quickly, then I didn't hesitate or question why.

When we reached home I fell in through the back door in an exhausted heap and Father left me and went straight into the front room, closing the door behind him.

Jeanie had been getting the tea ready and now she spun away from the table and helped me off with my coat and mud-caked shoes. I was crying softly, the obvious reaction at the sight of the laid tea-table and the leaping logs in the grate, after the stark fear and insecurity of Squirrel Walk. Jeanie was my comforter just then, telling me everything was all right. Father was in the front room, telephoning.

It was a late tea we all sat down to, with Father explaining quietly that he had phoned for an ambulance and the police to go up to the house.

In a back upstairs room he had discovered a tramp lying on dirty sacks.

The next day everyone was talking about it in the village. It seemed that the man had crawled in there out of the cold and had then become too ill to leave. For three days he had been without food or water but now he was slowly recovering in hospital.

"He could have died," Jeanie said to me, round-eyed, as we lay in bed a few nights later, discussing it all. "Fancy Dad going in there all by himself—wild horses wouldn't have dragged me!"

I wondered that Father's action surprised her. She knew full well that he was fearless.

In spite of all our questioning and probing, Father would not talk about the incident. The Sunday walks continued, though never again did he tell us the story of The House in the Moonlight, and our routes did not take us along Squirrel Walk any more.

It was many years later and on a warm summer's day that I knelt beside him as he sat resting in a deckchair in the garden. His eyes were shaded by sunglasses and his hair now was iron-grey.

"They are pulling down the house in Squirrel Walk," I told him. "I cycled past there today and saw them."

My father turned and gave me a half-smile. "That should lay the ghosts for ever."

"Ghosts?" I repeated. "You never believed in ghosts, did you?"

"No," he laughed softly, "of course not."

"But why did you leave me that day and go up to the house? You know, Father, I've always been curious about it."

A bee hovered over a bed of marigolds and, in the warmth and peace of our garden, that night long ago seemed only a dark echo in my memory.

"I couldn't very well take you with me," he said. "You see, I wasn't too sure what I was going to find."

"But what made you go at all?" I insisted.

He took off his sunglasses and now I saw his eyes were narrowed against the glare. They were thoughtful, far away, remembering.

"I glimpsed a face, Judy, a face at an upstairs window, and I knew I had to investigate."

"The tramp's face," I murmured, "was that what you saw? The poor old man beckoning for someone to come and help him."

Father twirled the sunglasses round his fingers. "No, it wasn't the tramp's face. He was too ill and sick to move and was unconscious when I found him."

"Then what was it?" I demanded, a tingling, spine-chilling sensation touching me.

"No face, really; just moonlight on the window, coupled with my own imagination. If I hadn't gone quickly I'd never have gone at all. I think it was the most frightening experience of my life; that gloomy old house, the creaking front door and the rotting staircase."

"But you were never afraid of anything," I said. "Mother always used to say that you'd rush in where angels fear to tread."

He patted my hand that rested on his knee. "When you have children of your own, Judy, you will realise that fear is the most communicable emotion there is. Every parent has to stifle it in himself to save youngsters from being timid and afraid. I told you tall ghost stories, improbable ones, so that you would have the macabre in the right perspective."

"And yet," I said, "The House in the Moonlight wasn't improbable, was it? The face at the window and the beckoning finger . . ."

My father stood up then, stretching himself in the sun. "No," he answered, "perhaps that's why I never told the story again."

I stayed kneeling on the grass, watching him walk away towards his greenhouse. I hoped that one day, when I was older and had children of my own, I should remember his example.

Fear has many faces, but at that moment I knew that it is the truly imaginative who are afraid and yet can maintain the mask of courage for the sake of others.

For a few minutes that afternoon my father had lowered his mask; and I knew that of all the good and brave things he had done in his lifetime—this admission was his most courageous act.

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ANSWERS TO THE ATHLETICS QUIZ ON PAGE 31

1. At Oxford, on May 6th 1954.
2. Cross-country running, shooting, horse-riding, swimming and fencing.
3. Six miles, at 27 mins. 47.0 secs., and 10,000 metres, at 27 mins. 39.4 secs.
4. Jesse Owens, of the USA.
5. Twice. The Games arranged for 1916 and 1940 were cancelled because of the World Wars. No Games were scheduled for 1944.
6. 4 lbs. 6.6 oz.
7. Five: Tamara three and Irina two.
8. (a) 26 miles 385 yards. (b) In order that, in the 1908 London Olympics, the race would finish in front of the royal box.
9. The Italian, Dorando Pietre, who entered the stadium first but, because he was helped over the finishing-line. was disqualified.
10. James "Randy" Matson, with a putt of 70 ft. 7 ins.
11. Three.
12. Mrs. Francina E. Blankers-Koen of the Netherlands, who won medals for the 100 and 200 metres, 80 metre hurdles and the 4 x 100 metre relay.
13. 3,610 miles from New York to Los Angeles, run from March 21st to June 16th 1929.
14. In 1964, at Tokyo.
15. 1958. Cardiff Arms Park, Cardiff.

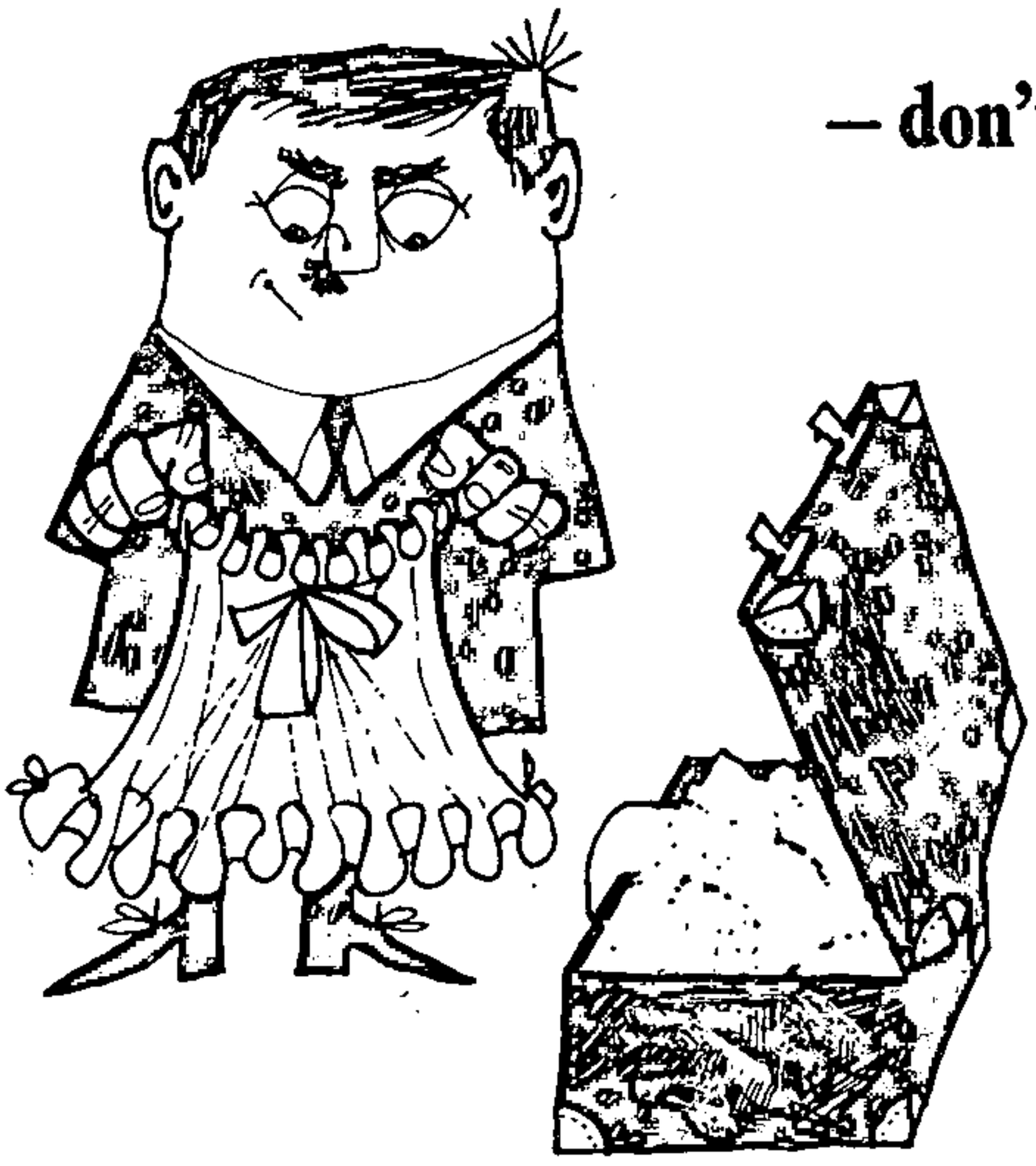
Travelling Light

—with PETE

Five pages of holiday hints to pack a laugh in your luggage

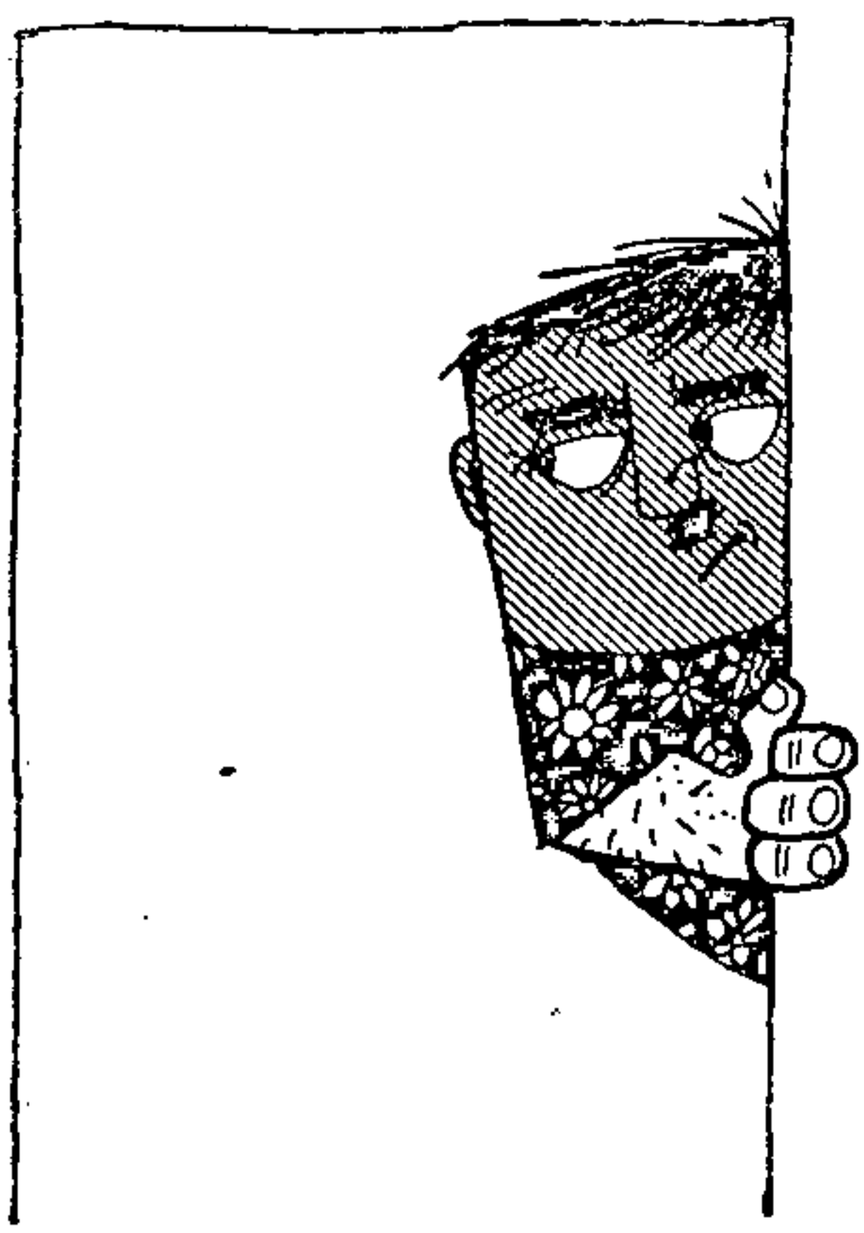
"When in Rome," etc.,
is all very well, but—

Travelling Light



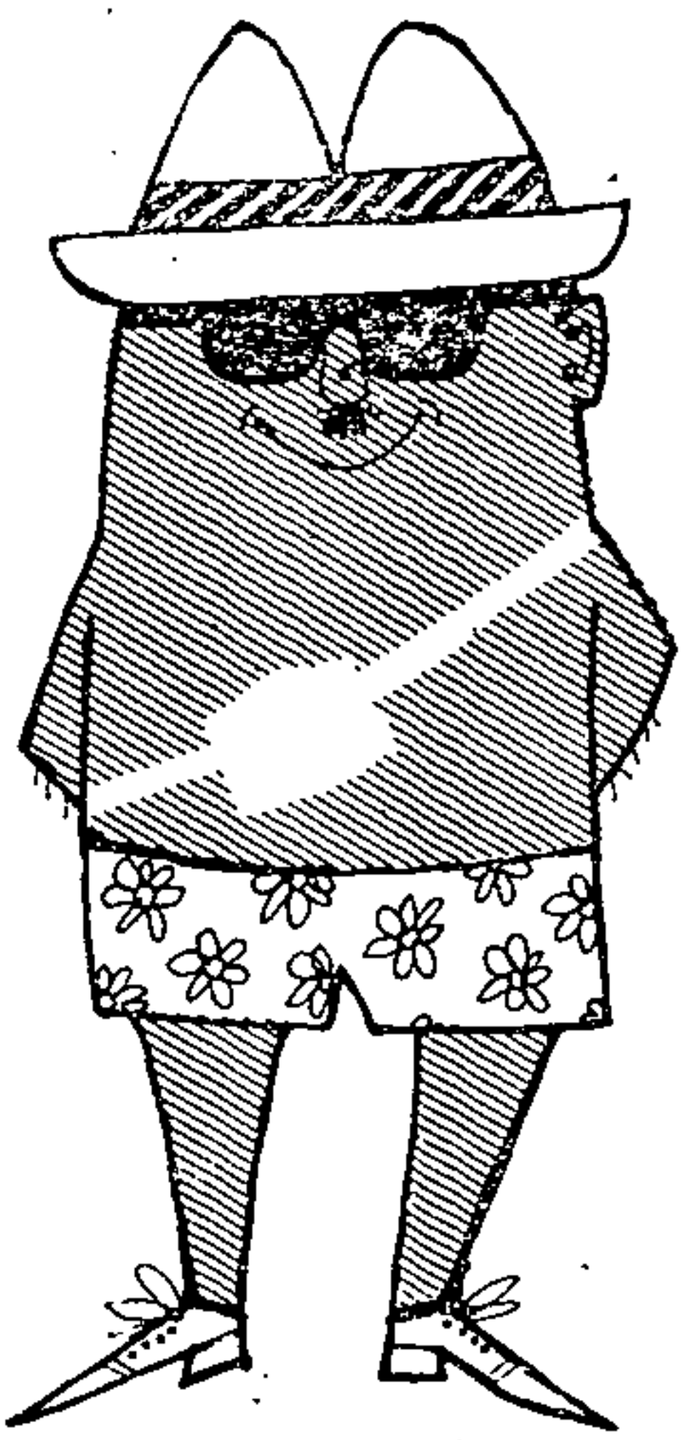
– don't get separated from your luggage

DAMEN



Try to learn a little of the language

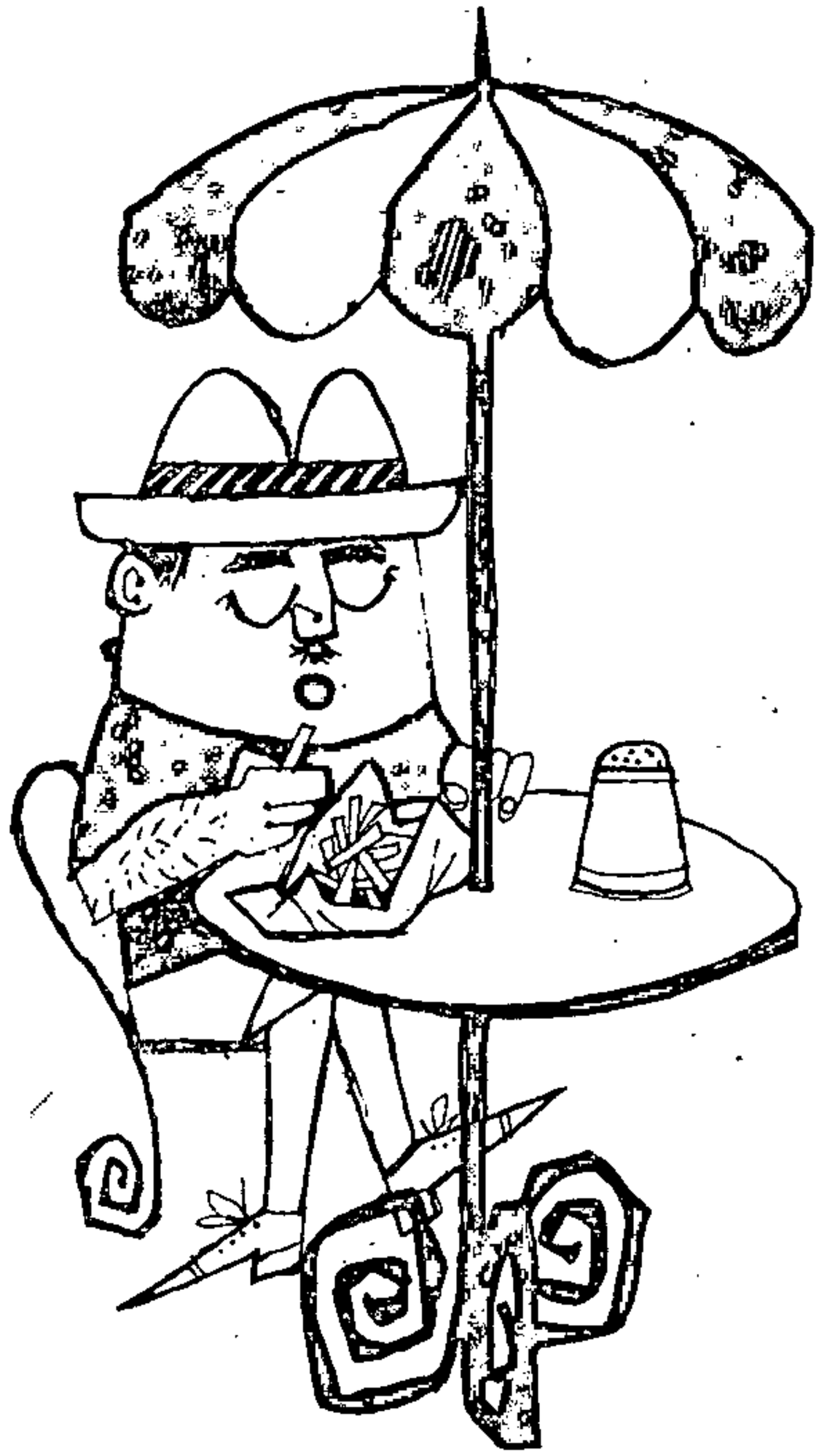
— with Pete



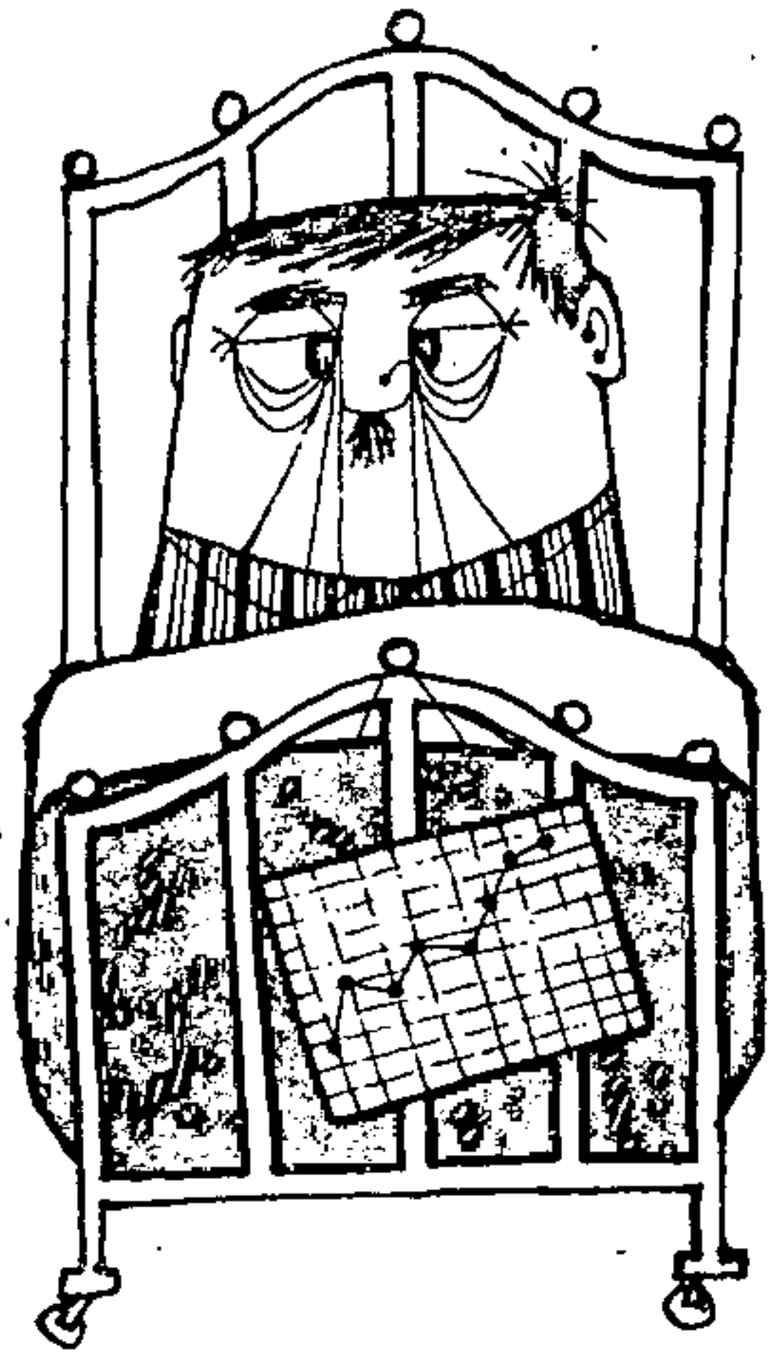
Guard against an uneven tan

A simple currency conversion card from your bank will save some time (and money)

Travelling Light



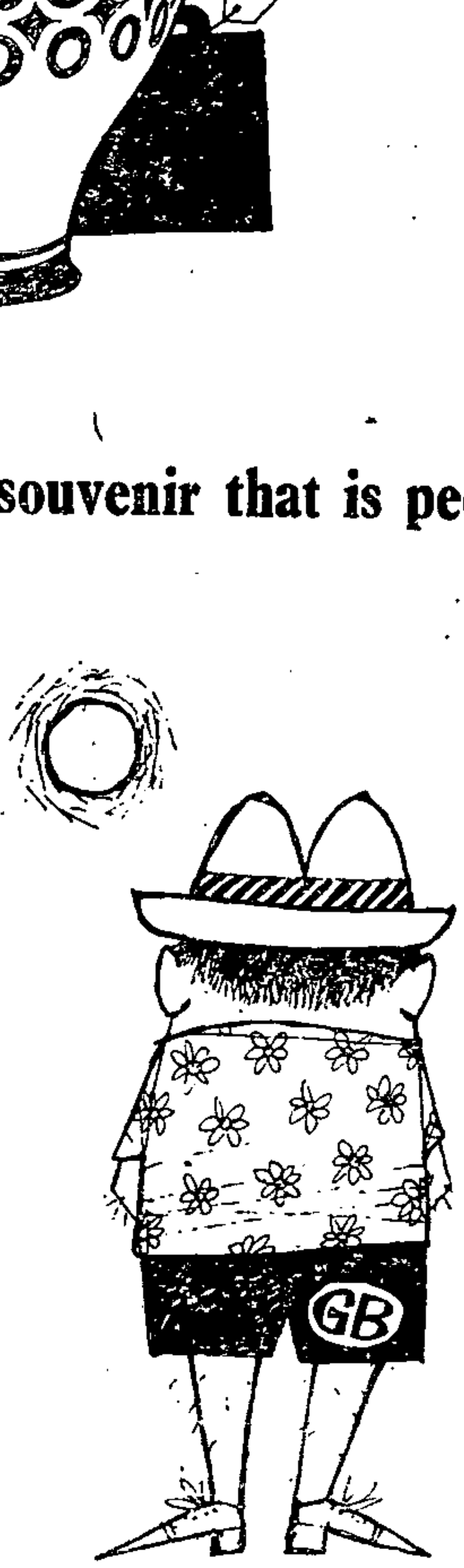
Don't reject all the dishes . . .



. . . but select carefully

— with Pete

Don't be tempted to buy every souvenir that is peddled



PETE

GREY SEAS OF JUTLAND

From a brilliant new novel

Argosy selects a long extract . . .

The Royal Navy goes into battle!

BY W. H. CANAWAY

The author of "Sammy Going South" has produced something quite different with his exciting new book. It contains an account of the great naval battle of Jutland which took place just fifty years ago this summer, when the ships of Beatty and Jellicoe clashed with the German Imperial Battle Fleet. It is history that can never be repeated now—the big battleships fighting it out on the high seas. W. H. Canaway brings it vividly to life, seen through the eyes of a destroyer commander.

As a boy, George Wynne had longed to join the Navy, only to be rewarded with beatings from his parson father for associating with "low sailors and that sort of scum." But, thanks to an aunt with an admiral among her friends, he realised his dreams and here he was, heading for the biggest naval engagement since Trafalgar . . . A personal battle, too, for over on the other side was Werner, the German cousin whom George had hated from his youth.
The date: 31st May–1st June, 1916. The place: On board the "Nilotic," in the Firth of Forth . . .

ELEVEN-THIRTY, all secured for sea, and steel throbbing under him. George turned from the chart-table and the faint radiance of light where Ridgway, his Navigating Officer, was busy. George glanced at the binnacle past the Quartermaster and the Telegraphsman, and then gazed past the shadowy forms of his First Lieutenant, the bridge messengers, the Leading Signalman, into the blackness about him—a blackness heightened by the glow of sparks from the *Nilotic*'s funnels. She was sailing without her Midshipman, who had

gone down with enteritis too late to be replaced. George could hear no sound but the roar of the exhaust fans and, above the roar, the nagging rattle of some small thing aft which was loose—a grating?—and which vibrated on a harmonic. It was getting on his nerves; in the morning he would have a working-party lay aft to trace it and stop it.

The *Nilotic* was rolling viciously in the short steep seas of the Firth of Forth: five-hundred-and-fifty tons dedicated to speed and attack. With only two four-inch guns and two eighteen-inch torpedoes she might have seemed lightly armed; but each of her torpedoes was supposed to hold a more deadly threat than a shell from the largest battleship. She was uncomfortable, and at sea her mess-decks were a cold wet hell for her crew of seventy; her hull was thin as cardboard; she used coal so fast that she could remain at sea for only fifteen hours at full power of thirty knots, but at cruising speed she was most economical, able to steam fifteen hundred miles.

Away to starboard and simultaneously with the starboard look-out's call, George saw the enormous mass of shadows that was the *Lion*, Beatty's flagship, sliding past, then her tiny sternlight—the only light on the ship. Twenty-seven thousand tons cruising along with no more than a cigar-end glowing at her stern. The battlecruiser disappeared ahead, then came the *Princess Royal*. After her would come the *Queen Mary*, then the *Tiger*. George thought that was the most beautiful ship ever built; her lines had a lyrical quality of grace and speed. The next ones, the *New Zealand* and *Indefatigable*; well, they were big ships, but George privately had his doubts about them. To move seventeen thousand tons at twenty-five knots meant a sacrifice, and with these ships it had been armour. He knew that a German ship of comparable size—say the *Von der Tann*—had a nine-and-three-quarter-inch belt, whereas these two British ships had a six-inch belt.

After the 1st and 2nd Battlecruiser Squadrons would come the 5th Battle Squadron of fast battleships: the *Barham, Valiant, Warspite, Malaya,* all of which merited a mental nod of approval. George had seen them often, and knew that if he had to go into action in a big ship, he would choose one of these. Eight fifteen-inch guns and fourteen six-inch gave one a feeling of security, especially when this massive armament was coupled with a thirteen-inch belt and turret armour. There was no need, either, for testy signals by the fleet flagship to these vessels to make less smoke. They burnt oil, not coal; and while a coal-burning battleship or battlecruiser at

full speed emitted dense black clouds, these ships were clean. Well, there they all were, invisibly strung out in the Firth, under way; and with them were fourteen light cruisers and twenty-seven destroyers to look after them. The Battlecruiser Fleet was out, and over on the *Nilotic*'s port beam a shaded blue light was flashing.

"Signal, sir, from Captain 'D,'" said Leading Signalman Flatt.

George read the signal...

"Executive signal, sir."

Another bloody boring fleet sweep was starting.

George said to Ridgway, who had come up from the chart-house, "Starboard ten, Pilot," and Ridgway spoke into a voice-pipe.

And then it was full ahead, roaring and rattling in the dark past the battlecruisers, wind getting up and whipping into his face over the canvas dodger of the bridge, their light cruiser fine on the starboard and the other destroyers tearing along in company as they took station in the screen.

George sent a messenger down to fetch coffee and sandwiches. He munched them with Fogerty, his First Lieutenant; George was separated from him by a mere six months' seniority, which was not much, but enough for the Navy. Fogerty was a tactful Irishman, dark and beetle-browed, with a great hooked nose. He chewed in silence, noting that George was in one of his taciturn moods.

Somewhere to the north of them, Jellicoe was out from Scapa Flow and Cromarty with the Battle Fleet: twenty-seven big ships, if Hood was with Jellicoe; George was uncertain about that. And the escorts? There would be eight or nine armoured cruisers, with a dozen light cruisers and fifty or so destroyers on the screen. The British capital ships in the North Sea could hurl a combined weight of nearly four-hundred thousand pounds of shell against the enemy with each broadside. They'd been waiting long enough to do it, George thought, yawning.

He realised that the *Nilotic* was beginning to close the flotilla leader, and rang for a reduction in speed at the same time as a light flickered from his senior officer's ship.

"Signal, sir."

It was Flatt again, bearded, pot-bellied. He read the signal aloud, word by word, then repeated it. *Stay back to heel, Towser.*

The trouble with Flatt was that he had an expressive voice.

Where most signalmen read in a dull monotone, like a child learning to piece letters together, Flatt gave each word its correct emphasis, though with never a flicker on his face.

"Towser," George said bitterly to Fogerty. "Just because he's sitting in a light cruiser we're a little dog to him. What I'd like is some independent action. A nice little patrol somewhere, just a half-flotilla. This sea's so thick with admirals even the damned half-stripes think like them: it's catching..."

George worked automatically. They were closed up at night cruising stations, and here he was playing in the greatest fleet the world had ever known, children floating toys in a bath; but the bath was the North Sea. The port watch was relieved; Fogerty went below; Sub-Lieutenant Grace stood with George, a fair and rubicund young man making a great show of dabbing at a shaving-cut sustained in removing a scarcely existent growth of beard; Chief E.R.A. Fazackerley reported gloomily and hollowly up the voice-pipe that that there gland was playing up again and as like as not he'd have to spend the next three days nursing it, then an hour later reported that that there gland had stopped playing up. He added an aside which George was ostensibly not supposed to hear, that he wished to God he was back in the *Marlborough* and not in a bloody salmon-tin; and then the ship was bucking and screwing in the seaway as they set course eastward for the Long Forties.

"Lord," said George as his legs began to ache, "who'd ever sell a farm and go to sea?" It was the sailor's standard immemorial complaint. He felt more at ease in the presence of Sub-Lieutenant Grace, who was so much his junior that he could unbend.

Grace said, "Please, sir, is this just another sweep?"

"Don't ask me, Sub. I don't know anything. I expect so: no-one's told me otherwise."

"A rating on 'A' gun says he knows a killick sparker in the *Lion* who told him the German Fleet's coming out."

George laughed and said, "It must be true if it comes on that sort of authority."

"Do you think there may be a battle this time, sir?"

George said, "Heavens, I don't know, man."

The port look-out shouted, "Light, sir, bearing red five-oh..."

It was a fishing-vessel, duly noted in the appropriate log. George yawned and shivered.

"Would you like to go below for a while, sir?" Grace asked eagerly, anxious for a chance to take the ship while the First

Lieutenant, scourge of all junior officers, was off the bridge.

George's bladder was calling. He said, "Just inspecting the heads, Sub."

George went below to relieve himself, exchanging a word with the Quartermaster when he came back, casting a glance round the darkened ship: the huddled figures of a ship's company closed up at defence stations. Action: that was what he wanted. He was missing the war, tied up on these senseless fruitless sweeps on which nothing ever happened. The German Fleet would never come out in strength while Admiral Scheer could pin down the whole British Grand Fleet simply by sitting in the Jade Basin behind his mine-fields; there was no need even to leave home.

"I have a German cousin," George said to Grace on a sudden impulse.

"Really, sir?"

"He was in the *Sachsen* last time I heard of him. Do you know her?"

Grace hesitated.

"I'm afraid I'm not as well up in these Boche battleships as I should be," he confessed.

"She's a lumbering old sow of a battleship; same class as *Pommern*. Pre-dreadnought. Well now . . .?"

"If she's a pre-dreadnought she must be—oh, thirteen thousand tons or so."

"Good. Carry on."

"Twelve-inch guns?" Grace hazarded.

"Eleven-inch; four of them. What about secondary armament?"

Grace said, "I'm sorry, sir, I haven't an earthly."

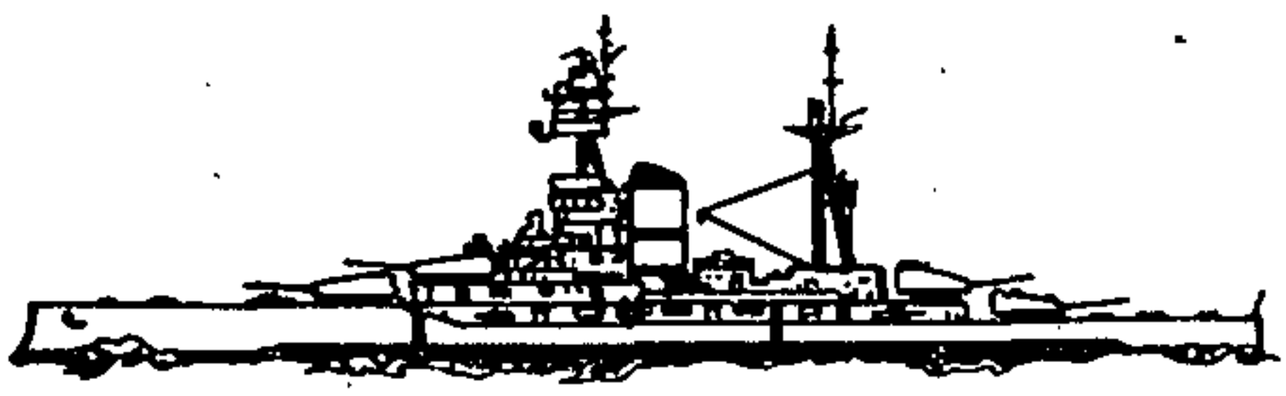
"Fourteen six-point-sevens, and six torpedo tubes. Almost anything that floats can run rings round her, but she carries a hell of a load of armour for her size. You've got to do more than spit at a ship like that to sink her." George paused a moment and then said with peculiar intensity, "Now listen. In your watch below I require you to make yourself familiar with the *Pommern*-class silhouette. The *Sachsen* has very high upperworks—higher than the *Pommern*; she has military masts of equal height, and she carries cranes amidships. Repeat that."

Mystified, Grace repeated the details, and then George said, "Good. If you sight her on any occasion when you're serving with me, Sub, you'll find it has been very well worth your while."

George retired to the starboard side of the bridge, legs apart and braced against the ship's motion. He kept his own company while Grace worked the ship and enjoyed himself. George watched him, satisfied; the Sub-Lieutenant was steady and reliable despite his appearance of having dressed in naval uniform for a school concert.

At three in the morning George left Grace to an hour's reward of heaven-sent responsibility until Ridgway should relieve him. George staggered into the chart-house and fell fully dressed on his settee, as the battlecruisers and their escorts steamed steadily east-north-east with a light wind astern, heading for their rendezvous with Jellicoe's fleet to the west of the Skagerrak. For a brief minute George allowed himself a few flickers of fantasy: Werner's ship lying as a sitting duck, the sudden white streak of the *Nilotic*'s torpedo; Werner peeled by steam, Werner riddled by splinters, Werner inching armless and legless like an obscene slug along a bloody deck . . .

Then, abruptly, George switched off the fantasies. He had tended lately to indulge too much in them, he told himself. Only if the whole fleets of Britain and Germany should be brought to battle would there be a real chance of his encountering Werner in the *Sachsen*. And that was a remote possibility, desire it, will it, as he might. Though he would have liked to believe them, a cold part of his brain told himself that rumours must be discounted. He would believe the German Fleet was out when he saw it. Meanwhile this was just another sweep, and meanwhile, he slept like a dead man for three hours.



A calm, clear morning, a sea of leaden grey broken by the white wakes of the ships, a herring-gull perching on a torpedo davit, then flapping and soaring away as George came up from the tiny cabin flat.

The *Lion* and the three ships of the 1st Battlecruiser Squadron were over on the port beam. Beyond them again, through their funnel smoke and the dotted ships forming their screen, George saw a few distant smudges of more smoke from the nearer ships of the 5th Battle Squadron's screen; the

squadron itself was beyond George's horizon. From his position on the screen of the 2nd Battlecruiser Squadron George could see, away ahead of the destroyer in company with his own, the leading ships of the 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron and beyond them again, the smoke of the other two squadrons of light cruisers. From the port-wing to the starboard-wing of the cruisers spread ahead was a distance of twenty-five miles; and when the Battlecruiser Fleet met the still larger Battle Fleet that afternoon and the two joined to form the Grand Fleet, there was no power on earth that could withstand them —or so George had been told, or believed.

George's morning began: a routine morning, part of a routine sweep as far as he was concerned. He looked round the ship as he went to the bridge, glanced at the compass, had a word with the Quartermaster at the wheel. He nodded to Ridgway and Fogerty, cast an eye once more round the ship from his new position, and then took the deck-log and signal-log and stood alone, reading the routine entries without much interest. There was nothing for him to do. Nothing. The ship was running herself. That was as it should be; she was a good ship because George and his First Lieutenant and his Coxswain had seen to the matter during her working-up period. But over and above that, beyond the question of the ship's efficiency, there was no independence of action. George in the *Nilotic*, and the other destroyer captains, were controlled by their flotilla leaders, controlled in their turn by the squadron flagship, controlled similarly by the Battlecruiser Fleet Flagship, where Beatty held sway in the *Lion*; and even dashing, flamboyant Beatty would, in his turn, submit soon to the control of the Grand Fleet Flagship *Iron Duke*, where Jellicoe reigned —controlled by the Admiralty.

It was Battle Orders which were ultimately to blame, George thought, as he closed the deck-log and handed it back, leaning on his heels. He read the signal-log, passed it back, and sighed. In peace-time, fleet manœuvres had assumed the intricate and beautiful quality of a vast ballroom of dancers executing a complicated cotillon, formal, academically pleasing, but as rigid as the mathematics which went on in the transmitting stations of the battleships.

And what of war-time? Apart from Tsushima, when Togo had annihilated his Russian opponents in 1905, there had been no major fleet action since Trafalgar in 1805; even at Tsushima a mere twelve battleships had been involved. And there had been no British ships of war at Tsushima. George wondered

from time to time exactly what would happen if ever they met the German Fleet. How strongly did the spirit of Nelson run in British veins after so long? Or to put it another way, how strongly would Battle Orders allow it to run? And, yet another way, how far would the torpedo?

Since the Austrian, Luppis, had invented the torpedo, and the Englishman, Whitehead, had perfected it at Woolwich Arsenal so that the Royal Navy had it by 1875, a revolution had taken place. Having got the weapon, the Navy had to produce an answer to it, for other navies would not be slow to build torpedo-boats of their own. The answer was the destroyer, herself carrying torpedoes capable of sinking the largest dreadnoughts; and the final retort was the submarine, invisible, deadly.

Fear of the torpedo and fear of the submarine had been drilled into George for years. There was no way of detecting a hostile submarine other than by the most accidental sighting of a tiny periscope wake; the laws of chance dictated that out of a number of torpedoes fired at a squadron of dreadnoughts steaming, as each of Beatty's squadrons was now steaming, in line ahead, one torpedo in three was likely to strike home, and this despite the outer armour below the waterline, often despite the inner armour of hundreds of tons of coal. Plainly, if the object was to seek out the enemy's fleet and destroy it in a battleship engagement, those battleships had to be safely conveyed within range of the enemy so that the engagement could commence. It was not much use having the greatest dreadnoughts in the world if those ships were to be at the mercy of a small number of tiny vessels lurking below the surface of the sea. So arose the need for a large screen of light cruisers and destroyers, to plough every acre of water ahead of the huge mobile gun platforms which were the battleships and battlecruisers. The light cruisers spread ahead on their twenty-five-mile line might even sight the German High Seas Fleet, too . . . George sighed gently and said to Fogerty,

"What's for breakfast, Number One?"

"I haven't eaten yet, sir."

"You had breakfast, Pilot?"

"Yes, sir," Ridgway said. "Not very good this morning, I'm afraid. Fried corned beef."

"God," said George. "If the Germans don't kill us the food will."

Leading Steward Keogh appeared on the bridge from his pantry.

"What's for breakfast?" asked George.

"Porridge, sir. Corned beef," Keogh said.

"Ah, come on now," Fogerty said to his compatriot. "Sure, you can do better than that. Now what about a spot of hen fruit, eh?"

Keogh said, "Well, sir, I can manage four."

Fogerty looked at George and said, "How would you like them, sir?"

"Fried."

"Right, then. Fried eggs it is, on top of the bully."

Keogh went with a nod, and George said, "You Irish stick together like glue. That Keogh's a perfect squirrel, the way he hoards food. How long does he think a destroyer stays at sea? You'd think he was in the *Golden Hind* or something, stocking up for the circumnavigation of the globe."

"Yes, sir," said Fogerty, grinning.

George was cheered at the prospect of the meal, thinking that Keogh would serve them with two eggs each; and he was even more pleased when, after the porridge, the Leading Steward put a plate before him and then served Fogerty.

"Well, four eggs *each*," said George. "Capital. I can't even see the damned bully beef."

They fell to, and finished their breakfast with toast and marmalade and tea.

"Tell the Coxswain I want to see him," George said to one of the messengers, after the meal.

The Coxswain's name was Stevens. He was a Yorkshireman, six-feet-five inches tall, with a chest like a sideboard creasing and wrinkling the jacket of his Chief Petty Officer's uniform. He saluted and said, "Sir?"

George said, "D'you know a ship called the *Sachsen*?"

"Yessir," Stevens said. "*Pommern*-class, four eleven-inch, fourteen six-point-sevens, six submerged tubes. Her military masts are same 'eight. Midship cranes. She's an owd pre-dreadnought, sir."

Funny,' George thought. He hadn't meant to ask Stevens that. What had he wanted to say? With an effort, he remembered. The loose grating. But that didn't matter now.

He said, "If you sight that ship, there's ten pounds for you, Coxswain."

"Aye aye, sir." Stevens saluted and moved to the port-side bridge ladder, momentarily watching the look-out as the look-out watched the sea while the Leading Signalman kept his eyes fixed on the flotilla leader. Over in the light cruiser, a Yeoman

of Signals would be watching in turn through his telescope, his gaze steady on the squadron's flagship; and on the signal bridge of the battlecruiser others still were watching a signal being repeated by a cruiser acting as a link with the fleet flagship. From the time Beatty made a decision to the time that decision was carried out, say in one of the advanced light cruisers, ten minutes might elapse even in the most favourable conditions. He could have increased the speed of response by using radio, but radio silence was the rule except in emergency; during daylight, they relied for the most part on searchlight signals and to a lesser extent on flag hoists. So the sea was crossed and re-crossed by the gaze of scores of pairs of eyes looking inwards within the fleet, more or less fixedly, and by scores of other pairs of eyes moving, scanning the surface of the sea from close at hand to the horizon.

The morning passed. The weather became warmer, almost close. The fifty-three ships held their course; it was a dull, uneventful morning of a typical fleet sweep, and the captains on the screen, like George, were free to digest their breakfasts. But George was thinking of the *Sachsen*, presumably at anchor in the Jade now. The chart was in his mind: the mine-fields in the approaches, the swept channel leading out east of Heligoland and west of the Amrun Bank. Past the Vyl lightship, past the Horn Reefs... Oh, what was the use? He sighed, feeling a prisoner in this vast fleet. At midday he decided to remain on the bridge; he ate a plate of sandwiches and an apple, then drank a mug of coffee.

The Battlecruiser Fleet was due to turn north-by-east at two o'clock in order to make contact with Jellicoe's Battle Fleet, so that the merging of the two into the Grand Fleet might be accomplished. As George changed course in conformity with his flotilla leader's signals, he found himself on the starboard-wing of the screen with most of the fleet to port. At two o'clock he received the signal: *Maintain course and speed*, and they held on for another quarter of an hour.

George said to Fogerty, "The cruisers will be turning any minute now."

Away ahead of the *Nilotic*, George saw the silhouettes of the nearer light cruisers change as they altered course, and thicker plumes of smoke hid them as their speed increased. But George noticed idly that one ship had not turned. She was probably steaming to examine a fishing-vessel or a merchantman. The light cruiser was too far off for him to recognise her with any certainty, but it could possibly have been the

Galatea. Anyway she was soon hull-down on his starboard bow, and he forgot about her.

Somewhere to the north was Jellicoe, steaming southward with six columns of battleships, twenty-four of them, and eight armoured cruisers. On the screen there would be another sixty-five or seventy ships: light cruisers, destroyers, and a mine-layer. When Beatty joined Jellicoe it would be laughable, unthinkable that even the Germans should try to pit their Navy against such strength as that. George grimaced at his foolish vision of Werner in the *Sachsen*, with no matter how many powerful modern consorts, coming willingly to get in the way of a combined broadside of three-hundred-and-fifty turret guns, each one of which could throw a one-ton shell to the horizon. He clicked his tongue at his own stupidity and looked again in the direction taken by the light cruiser which had been detached, but she was now invisible. Nothing at all: she was merely moving to intercept some neutral ship, some bedraggled duck paddling puzzled and bewildered through this great concourse of proud and haughty swans. George watched the flotilla leader.

"Turning any moment now," he said.

Then the flags were fluttering at the yardarm of the flotilla leader, and George and Fogerty were looking at each other with raised eyebrows. They were ordered to turn not north, but south-south-east. They held on a while, then the order came to alter to north-east.

George had no idea what was happening, but then there was the sound of gunfire beyond his horizon. He assumed that the detached light cruiser was firing across the bows of a vessel which had ignored the command to heave-to. The firing increased, and he knew he had been wrong. The *New Zealand* and *Indefatigable* were taking up stations astern of the other battlecruisers. George estimated that Beatty's huge ships must have been making twenty-five knots to the flotilla's thirty. Already four slower destroyers were being overtaken by the massive dreadnoughts which loomed in the distance on the *Nilotic*'s quarter.

Plainly, this was not going to be just another sweep. It might be that the Germans had sent out a small force to make a raid on a British coastal town, possibly up in Scotland this time, instead of Yarmouth or Lowestoft. If so, they were in for a hot time of it.

George looked up as the port look-out called a report, and saw a small seaplane bumbling through the low cloud above

the flotilla. It became a speck in the eastern sky and then vanished: evidently it had been flown off from the little seaplane carrier *Engadine*. He believed that there was a considerable future ahead for the ship-borne aircraft, because of the vastly enlarged horizon enjoyed by flying machines, which might, in time, supplement or even take over some of the functions of scouting cruisers; but he doubted whether they would ever be of more value than that. Soon he heard the sound of far-off light guns in a sporadic series of bursts. Perhaps the firing came from enemy ships shooting at the seaplane.

Leading Signalman Flatt called, "Signal, sir, from Flag." He spelled out: "Butter . . . Johnnie . . . One. BJ One, sir." *Assume complete readiness for action in every respect.* Flatt then said, "Signal's down, sir."

"Very good," said George. He turned to Fogerty as the battle ensigns broke out in the big ships astern, and said, "Action stations."

George stood at the row of voice-pipes, flanked by Fogerty and Ridgway, his attention completely concentrated while he received the reports as each department of the ship closed up for action. Communications were tested, spare gear made ready, fire hoses run out. Magazines were manned, torpedo tubes' and guns' crews closed up; George heard Grace's voice rise to a squeak as he shouted to them to load.

There was no masthead look-out, nor was there provision for one in ships of the *Nilotic*'s class. The party on the bridge waited, scanning the sea ahead. It seemed ironical to George that the men high up in the tripod masts of the battlecruisers astern would have a better idea than himself of what was going on. But soon, on the horizon, he saw through his glasses first the dim smudges of smoke and then the outlines of enemy ships; both look-outs were shouting at once.

"Cruisers," Fogerty said. "They'll turn and run for the Horn Reefs if they know what's good for them at all."

Ridgway reported, "There's more smoke beyond them again, sir, bearing east-nor'-east."

"Thank you, Pilot," George said. "I see it already. That's too much for cruiser squadrons. Gentlemen, that is a fleet."

He held his breath for a moment, feeling his scalp tighten and noted even in that second, how the peak of his cap lifted slightly. Christ, he thought, of Thy mercy deliver Werner to me. Let this be Vice-Admiral Reinhard Scheer and the High Seas Fleet.

Then the smoke smudges were ships, five of them. First the masts, then the funnels, then the hulls revealed themselves in the binoculars. All five ships were two-funnelled, George observed.

Fogerty said, "Battlecruisers, sir. They're coming ahead of their cruisers. Those two leading ships look like the *Lützow*, both of 'em, so one'll be *Lützow* and the other *Derfflinger*; both eight twelve-inch."

George gave a groan of disappointment which caused both Fogerty and Ridgway to glance at him curiously.

He said, "It's the German Battlecruiser Fleet or Scouting Group or whatever they call it. Hipper's out. The *Lützow*'s his flagship. What d'you make of the others?"

Fogerty stared through the binoculars. At length he said, "They're *Moltke*-class . . . I can't be sure, sir."

George said, "Have the Coxswain report to me. He's a dab-hand at ship recognition. That man may go far."

When Stevens came George unslung his binoculars and handed them to him. "Take a look at those ships."

Stevens stood with his legs braced, gazed through the glasses, fiddled with the focus, gazed again and then said, "*Lootsow* and *Dirt-Flinger*, sir—sorry, I mean *Derfflinger*, sir. The next ship's the *Siddlitz*: she's got a high fo'c's'le and the fore-funnel's farther from the forem'st nor the next 'un, so next un's the *Moltkey*, sir, so that makes the last ship the *Von der Tann*."

Fogerty said, "Jasus."

Stevens handed back the binoculars and said stolidly, "Will that be all, sir?"

"Thank you, Coxswain, that's all," George said. "You can get back to your station now. You're no nearer earning that ten pounds, I'm afraid."

"No, sir," said Stevens. "Happen there's time enough yet, though." He saluted, and was gone.

"So," said George, "if Stevens is right, and I'm sure he is, those are the *Lützow*, *Derfflinger*, *Seydlitz*, *Moltke*, and *Von der Tann*. We'll make mincemeat of them."

In ten minutes the enemy ships were bearing eastward from Beatty's battlecruisers. George had no sight of the 5th Battle Squadron of fast battleships, the *Barham* and the rest. They were one knot slower than the battlecruisers, which had gained on them. As it was, Beatty had six battlecruisers against the Germans' five, and when action began the fast battleships would be able to catch up and add the tremendous striking power of their fifteen-inch guns to overwhelm Hipper: there would be six battlecruisers and four battleships against five battlecruisers.

George saw tiny orange flickers of light flower briefly from the beam of the leading German ship.

"The *Lützow*'s opened fire, sir," Fogerty said.

George glanced at his watch—3.49.

"Not at us, anyway," he said. "Nobody's interested in the small fry, Number One, you can be sure of that. Our turn isn't yet. But one thing I can promise you, Number One: you'll see a very interesting battlecruiser action today."

Sitting in the stalls, he added to himself. It was all strangely remote; the German line of battle assumed a parallel course to the British line westward of it, so that the Germans held the light-gage while their own ships were less easily seen against the gloomier eastern sky. The wind, such as it was, still blew gently west-south-west.

Over the destroyers the unseen arcs of the great shells lofted into the air as the ships opened fire, the *Lion* replying to the *Lützow*. In the turrets of Beatty's flagship the crews would be serving the guns; down in the shell-rooms and magazines the shells and the cartridges, the latter wrapped in tender silk, would be whisking up out of sight one after the other in the ammunition hoists, while up above, the huge breech-blocks of the guns would be hissing open, the anacondas of the chain-rammers uncoiling from their housings, then stiffening as they turned into straight bars and shoved the shells home, the cordite cartridges after them. The breeches would close and the indicating lamps burn in the turrets and fighting-tops, waiting for the fire-gongs; while in the transmitting stations information was fed into machines to tell men where to lay and train their guns: ultimately, mathematics was in command, whatever men might pretend. The gongs clanged, the guns fired. ship after ship after ship.

It was almost like fleet manœuvres; but now the shells were falling and in the *Nilotic* the rumble of the distant explosions began to come to George's ears. The battle lines were seen

dimly and fitfully through the smoke of the broadsides, but ever and again the orange pinpoints of light flickered out through the smoke.

"We're not concentrating our fire too well, sir," Fogerty said. "There's something funny going on."

George watched through the binoculars. He saw a great number of water-columns thrown up round the *Lützow*, but none round the second dreadnought, the *Derfflinger*, which was herself firing quickly. Both the *Lion* and *Princess Royal*, which was second in Beatty's line, were evidently firing at Hipper's flagship, and this was quite correct, since Battle Orders laid down that an extra ship should fire on the leader of the enemy line. But the *Queen Mary*, third in line, should have been engaging the *Derfflinger*. Plainly she was not doing so, and the German dreadnought was firing undisturbed.

George said, "That second ship's getting in some free gunnery practice."

Ridgway drew in his breath. He had been watching the British line, and now he said. "The *Lion*'s hit amidships."

George took his eyes from the German battlecruisers and squinted over to the *Lion*, but the moment for favourable observation had passed, and he could see nothing of *Lion* in the smoke for the present. But as he watched, he saw two red bursts of flame on the *Princess Royal*.

"So's the *Princess Royal*," he said. "That's good shooting."

Another flower of flame bloomed red, farther down the British line.

"The *Tiger*'s hit," Fogerty said. "Holy Mother of God, they've hit the *Lion* again, too."

The silhouettes of Beatty's battlecruisers changed, foreshortening as George watched; Beatty was turning slightly away just as Ridgway reported that at last a British shell had struck a German ship—the *Seydlitz*. Hipper turned away then also, steering south-east, both lines still in fierce combat.

Fogerty said, "Why don't they let us have a crack? What's the sense of keeping us sitting here?"

George said, "Cool that Irish whiskey you use for blood, Number One. You know quite well we can't go dashing about in front of the enemy when all those gentlemen in the dreadnoughts are counting shell-splashes and making entries in quadruplicate in umpteen little notebooks. We'd only be in the way. They'll send the destroyers in when they can't think of anything else to do, or they run out of carbon paper."

Soon waterspouts of bursting shells began to fall round the

Derfflinger as the *Queen Mary* changed her target to that ship from the *Seydlitz*, and scored a hit almost at once. George wondered how Beatty was feeling in the *Lion* about the Germans' quite evident initial superiority in gunnery, and he was glancing over at the fleet flagship, now visible again, when he saw a sudden rosette flare out on her midships turret, followed by a sheet of flame and then clouds of oily yellow smoke: a heavy hit right in the turret. There must have been ninety or a hundred men inside, and George took his mind hastily away from a mental picture of the shambles which would have been created by the bursting of a twelve-inch shell in that confined space.

They held their course to the thunder of the heavy guns, George, Fogerty and Ridgway watching in silence. More smoke intervened, and now they were catching only occasional glimpses of the enemy line; transferring their attention to Beatty's ships, they saw two hits scored on the last battlecruiser in the line, the *Indefatigable*, both shells hitting her forward and one appearing to strike on the fo'c's'le while the other exploded on the fore turret.

Fogerty said, "They're getting too good, these Jerries are . . . Oh, sweet Jesus."

As they watched, a huge jet of flame shot up from the forepart of the ship, then others, leaping through a cloud of smoke. The *Indefatigable* blew up, disintegrated, was gone; the sea where she had been was pocked by falling debris and columned by explosions from a final superfluous German salvo.

"God help all on board her," George said. "A thousand men."

And now it was like fleet manœuvres no longer. Almost as soon as the smoke from the *Indefatigable* had begun to drift away, Leading Signalman Flatt was calling out a signal from the flotilla leader repeated from the *Lion*: *Opportunity appears favourable for attacking.* They waited. A second signal came: *Proceed at your utmost speed.*

George blew down the engine-room voice-pipe.

"We're going to need all you can give her, Chief," he said. "Any more trouble with that gland?"

Chief E.R.A. Fazackerley said lugubriously, "Nay, sir, I've had namore bother. Steam for thirty knots, you can 'ave, and we'll see if we can't get another knot out of 'er if need be."

"Thanks, Chief," said George.

It was just after ten minutes past four. George waited, no longer watching the battle, but keeping his eyes fixed on the

flotilla leader's signal. The flag went up. *Attack the enemy with torpedoes.*

They waited, waited; ship after ship of the light forces was hoisting her answering pendant. At last the fluttering signal came down from the leader's yardarm.

"Signal's down, sir," Flatt called.

George was already at Ridgway's side. "Starboard twenty."

"Starboard twenty," Ridgway echoed unemotionally, repeating the order to the Quartermaster, and the *Nilotic* heeled viciously over as she turned through ninety degrees.

George rang down for full speed ahead with both engines, and the ship leapt forward, going to war at last. George was thinking that he might be killed, dreading the eventuality not because he feared death more than anyone else, but because he did not want to die before coming to grips with Werner. He was cursing quietly under his breath. In one minute the *Nilotic* could well be transformed into a blazing wreck, a sinking pyre, and if that should happen he would die in futility, his purpose unaccomplished. War was a waste. He should have gone to Germany, sought out Werner and fought a duel with him. Pistols at dawn. And now here he was facing not even Scheer's fleet, but these inconsequential battlecruisers of Hipper's Scouting Group. On one level, that of the serving naval officer, they were to be attacked and destroyed; but on the deeper personal level they meant nothing to him at all.

He said, "I'll take her now, Pilot."

THE *Queen Mary*, third in Beatty's line, was gone, blown up like the *Indefatigable*; two great explosions had torn her to pieces and left the sea empty where she had been. Over it rose a thousand-foot pillar of black smoke. In between helm orders George glanced back and wondered if anyone had survived the huge, brief holocaust.

The *Nilotic* was leading out towards the German battlecruiser line, the range closing rapidly and the sea alive with the fall of German shells, their waterspouts flung up twice as high as the destroyer's foremast. The noise was an entity in itself, individual explosions only occasionally emerging from the ground-bass of gunfire; the sound of the heavy guns of both sides now began to be reinforced by the thunder of the German battlecruisers' secondary armament as the attacking destroyers—three divisions of them in the first wave—came within range.

"Hard a-starboard!" George watched the sea now, the fate of *Queen Mary* forgotten. From behind the grey shapes of Hipper's line, looming larger, he saw the head-on silhouettes of German torpedo-boats and a cruiser as they advanced at full speed, now and then visible through the heaving spray of the shell-fire and the clouds of smoke which had begun to drift between the lines.

The combined approach speed of the opposed destroyers was nearly sixty knots. Hipper's light craft obviously had the task of breaking up the British attack, and it was up to the flotillas to press it home in spite of everything the enemy might bring to bear against them.

The *Nilotic*'s guns were barking now. George stood on the bridge with his legs braced against her bucking and heeling. He heard a swift loud sigh, and glanced down to find that the canvas dodger of the bridge was pierced by a neat round hole some three inches in diameter: the shell which had made it had passed through the protective mattress outside, through the canvas, and clean between his legs.

Ahead on his port bow were the *Nestor*, *Nicator* and *Nomad*. Smoke hid them from view, but right ahead at a thousand yards a German torpedo-boat appeared, small orange flickers at her bow, and beyond her was a German battlecruiser firing over her at the *Nilotic*.

George gazed at the opposing ships, watching the flash as their guns discharged, then immediately had the helm put over. The place where the *Nilotic* had been was a weltering tumult of foam, three ship's lengths away.

Another salvo flashed on its way; George yelled, "Starboard fifteen," and they were through again.

The port look-out shouted, his words lost in the noise of battle, and George looked over the side as the track of a torpedo drew its fast white line past the ship, aimed wildly by the torpedo-boat at the British battlecruisers.

A hand gripped George's shoulder, and he looked up again to see the headless body of Fogerty, the corpse standing upright and its hand clenching into George's flesh while blood gouted upward; then the grip relaxed and Fogerty fell sideways to the deck of the bridge.

The *Nilotic* was hit forward in the same instant; the wind of the blast hammered George on his knees at the after end of the bridge. He hauled himself to his feet, the deck slippery with Fogerty's blood. Fogerty had been decapitated by a six-inch shell which had hit him and then passed over to explode

astern of the *Nilotic*. Then a smaller shell from a torpedo-boat had made a direct hit on 'A' gun; striking the mounting, the shell had exploded, annihilating the gun and its crew, piercing the deck with fragments which passed through the bulkheads and tore out through the sides of the ship. The repair party was at work at once.

Where the gun and its crew had been there was nothing at all. Grace appeared, reeling like a drunkard out of the smoke, clutching his left arm; George could see his mouth opening and shutting, the teeth gleaming in the blackened face as he yelled orders. Farther forward, Stevens sat on the deck with a seaman's body across his knees and a pool of blood welling about him; Stevens shoved the bleeding body aside and stood up, shaking his head bemusedly and then going to the forward torpedo tube.

They were still closing the enemy, 'Y' gun firing fast and accurately, hitting the enemy torpedo-boat's upperworks three times. George was aware at the back of his mind that it was, in a sense, the fault of Fogerty's corpse that the *Nilotic* had been hit—the grip of the dead hand on George's shoulder and the horror of the sight having prevented him from giving the order to take evasive action; they were lucky the *Nilotic* had been hit only once.

The damage reports were coming in. A small fire had been started in the fore crew-space, nine men killed and nineteen injured by splinters, two men scalded by steam escaping from a severed pipe. The fire party had the fire under control almost at once, a repair party was busy patching the holes, and a stolid seaman was standing forward of where the shell had burst, facing aft with royal unconcern for the enemy fire and meticulously scattering sand as the blood and fragments of flesh were hosed away.

George beckoned to a messenger, a pale boy of fifteen or sixteen who was rubbing his backside, trying to ease the pain of the bruise caused when the blast had flung him down. The starboard look-out lay dead and unmarked beyond him, hanging over the side of the bridge with tatters of the dodger canvas flapping round him below a tangle of slashed voice-pipes.

"Tell the Coxswain to send a look-out up here smartly," he said. "Then tell Mr. Grace to fire when his sights come on. Step lively!"

"Aye aye, sir."

George held the *Nilotic* steady. A man came scrambling up

to replace the dead look-out. Over the *Nilotic*'s port bow George saw the *Nestor* and *Nicator* running ahead, while beyond them, the German battlecruiser silhouettes were changing as they turned in an attempt to avoid torpedoes. One of them was hit already: a vast spout of water, steam and smoke was billowing up from the *Derfflinger*. In the appalling noise of combat George heard nothing as Grace fired the forward torpedo, but he saw the splash of its discharge and at once began to zigzag again.

Flatt, capless and showing a bald head in contrast to his thick beard, was at George's elbow; his nose was skinned and shiny like a peeled aubergine. He said, "Destroyer Recall's been flying five minutes or more now, sir." He winked conspiratorially. "I didn't like to disturb you before, seeing as you was busy."

"Very good," said George. "Hard a-starboard."

As the *Nilotic* came about, George saw that the *Nestor* was labouring, her speed dropping rapidly; the *Nicator* had just managed to clear the other ship's stern and was steaming back at full speed. Beyond the *Nestor* another British destroyer was stopped. George concentrated on dodging the salvoes again as the *Nilotic* led back. Ridgway was not on the bridge.

The sea was still torn by shells, even though the German battlecruisers were turning north. Beatty's were reversing course also. The Germans were making a remarkably long turn if they were merely taking avoiding action. George looked over his shoulder as Ridgway staggered up on to the bridge, his jacket gone, his trousers stained with paint, and a wild look in his eye.

"Where the hell have you been?" George asked.

Ridgway said, "What's been happening? Something seemed to hit me, and when I came to I was in the paint store."

"You all right?"

"Yes, sir. That's the funny part of it. A bit wobbly, but that's all."

George said, "Hipper's turned his fleet. You'd better get aft, but have a look over there before you go."

He pointed south-eastward, away to the horizon, where the low grey shapes of battleships wheeled up over the rim of the earth, slowly, inevitably as dawn.

"That's why he's turned," George said.

One, three, five, eight, nine, fifteen, seventeen, twenty, and still they came.

"Christ," Ridgway said.

They looked back at Hipper's line, and the great battle-cruisers seemed suddenly insignificant beside the force that was approaching. Two German torpedo-boats lay near the battle-cruisers, both stopped and one sinking; the big ships were shrouded in smoke from hits. But now they would have breathing space. The High Seas Fleet was coming to their aid, and if Beatty held on he would be wiped out.

George said to Ridgway, "Our friend Scheer has come to join the party. Pilot, see the wounded are comfortable, will you?"

George's voice rang with exultation, but Ridgway showed no reaction; presumably he was merely accepting the fact that his captain was a fire-eater.

George cleared his throat and said in a more subdued tone, "Tell Pills I'll come below as soon as I can and have a look at the casualties. Then get on to the Bosun's Mate and see if he can lash out some grub for the hands; they can fall out for meals in reliefs. I think we'd be advised to snatch a bite as well. Oh yes, and belay what I said about your going aft. Come back here."

"Yes, sir," said Ridgway. Stevens had already sent a couple of hands to repair the voice-pipes. Ridgway glanced at the men's frantic activity for a second, and then at the German Battle Fleet. Moving away, he said to George, "It looks like being rather a busy evening."

BEATTY's battlecruisers were turning sixteen points to starboard, and the Germans were duplicating the movement so as to keep abeam. The *Nilotic* and the other surviving destroyers in Beatty's flotillas were ordered to remain on the disengaged side, and found themselves on a northerly course on the port-wing of the Battlecruiser Fleet, well out of the combat. The 5th Battle Squadron was turning now astern of the battlecruisers, and the turning point was fifteen or sixteen thousand yards from the *Nilotic*. It was a respite for her, but not for the fast battleships as they turned beyond Beatty's line, each ship in succession at the same pivoting point.

Grace stood with George and Ridgway, his arm in a sling and his face pale—less from his wound, a forearm slashed by a shell splinter, than from shock at being alive at all—and blew gently through his teeth.

The turning squadron was coming within range of Scheer's battleships as they pressed on from the southward and the 5th

Battle Squadron headed towards them in order to reach the pivoting point; Hipper was firing at them, too. First the *Barham* came under fire, then the *Valiant,* then the *Warspite.*

Grace said, "They're taking a hammering, sir. Why do you think they weren't ordered to turn together?"

"Yours not to reason why," said George, the strange exultant tone, almost of suppressed mirth, back in his voice. "Could be to draw some fire from the battlecruisers: they've taken just about everything so far, and the 5th B.S. carries a hell of a load of armour. Get back to your action station now, Sub."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Ridgway and Grace exchange a glance: Grace's lifted eyebrows, Ridgway's admonitory frown, but he ignored it.

The German battlecruiser line was invisible from the *Nilotic* now. Away to the southward, however, the ships of Scheer's Battle Fleet were a vast concourse on the starboard quarter, flashing and twinkling orange sparks, returning sixfold the roaring salvoes from the four British battleships.

"The *Malaya*'s turning early," Ridgway said with relief. "Would you like to look at the wounded now, sir, while things are quiet? We've had to put some of them in the wardroom flat because there's water in the crew-spaces. I can look after things up here."

"Very well," said George. He was moving to the ladder when he heard a yell. Turning aft, he saw Stevens waving and gesticulating.

Stevens ran up the starboard bridge ladder, recollected himself, saluted and said, "Sir, beg to report I've sighted that ship."

George followed the direction of Stevens' pointing finger, gazing through the binoculars; and the thunder of the firing seemed to dim in his ears as he found himself looking at a pre-dreadnought of the *Pommern*-class, an insignificant battleship compared with the leaders. She was *Pommern*-class, right enough; but she had very high upperworks, military masts of equal height so far as George could see, and cranes amidships.

He slapped Stevens on the shoulders and said, "Good work, Coxswain, a tenner it is," laughing out loud for a moment. Then he sent Stevens back to his station and grinned at Ridgway.

Pointing he said, "That pre-dreadnought at the rear of the line there—see it? That's the *Sachsen.* I've got a cousin aboard her."

"Really, sir?" Ridgway said politely. "It looks like being quite a family party."

George found that he was shaking with rage.

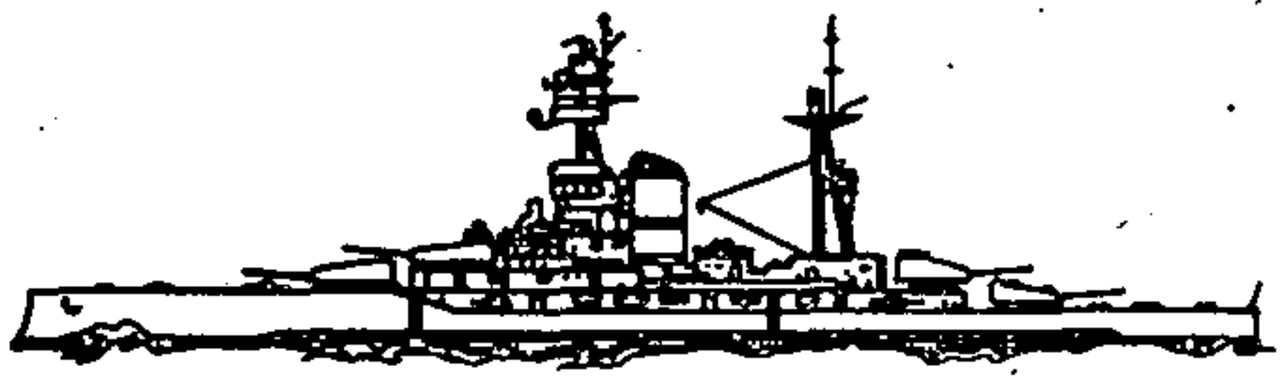
He said intensely, "Watch yourself, Pilot. Just watch yourself." And then he turned towards the *Sachsen* and shouted, "Whoring, thieving bastard." He looked sideways at. Ridgway and said in a normal tone, "Just wait, Pilot. It'll be like gutting a mackerel—split her right open if we get the chance."

Ridgway's eyes were wide. He swallowed and said, "Yes, sir. Yes, of course . . . Er—the wounded, sir?"

"The wounded," George said. "Oh, very well, I'll go and see them now, before the action starts. Keep an eye on that ship. Just you keep an eye on her, you hear me?"

"Aye aye, sir," Ridgway said, his face scared.

George glanced at him sharply, then made to descend the port bridge ladder. It was fortunate that he was still holding with one hand to a stanchion, for the ladder had been blown away and his foot met nothing but the air. He pulled himself back and went to the starboard ladder.



George made his way along the upper deck—past the engine-room hatch, past the searchlight platform, the after torpedo tube, the after gun platform, to the hatch which led to the captain's cabin and the wardroom flat. Immediately abaft this hatch was the secondary steering position: a low screen hid the compass, telegraph and steering wheel; below was the Engineer's Store, and below that again the twin screws of the ship. George hoped they would never need to use that steering wheel: if it ever was necessary the odds were that he would be dead.

He ducked down the hatch and companionway into the tiny lobby, passing his own cabin and going forward into the wardroom. This had been turned into a dressing-station for the worst casualties crammed on the deck. The port side had been converted into an operating-theatre, where Surgeon-Probationer Wilkins cut and stitched and amputated, his fine-drawn Grecian profile unchanging as he bent above the

improvised operating-table, his hands and arms covered with blood to the biceps.

"All right, Pills?" George said.

Wilkins paused and said, "Yes, sir. We had a bad time at first. The lights went out when we were hit, and we had to use oil lamps just when we needed good light. But we're on the emergency lighting now. The minor casualties are up forward in the seamen's mess-deck."

George nodded, went over to the sick-berth attendant, spoke with him briefly, giving him news to pass to the wounded men, then picked his way round them. The "burns"—two men scalded by steam escaping from ruptured pipes—had died already and their faces were covered. George bent over Boy First Class Taggart, a sixteen-year-old Scot from Greenock, whose liver and spleen had been punctured by splinters and his spine hit.

George said gently, "How are you feeling?"

Taggart grinned. He said, "Och, I'm just fine, sir," and died at once, a sudden switching-off of life which shocked George the more because it was so apparently undramatic: one moment the boy's eyes had been alert, though bleared by pain and smoke; the next, they were staring and unfocused, the spirit gone.

George covered Taggart's face, straightened up and sighed, spoke to a few more men, then left the wardroom, going forward when he reached the upper deck, then down to the engine-room.

Chief E.R.A. Fazackerley said, "That there gland's as sweet as a nut now, sir. But would somebody please mind telling me what's going off?"

George frowned, then remembered that Fazackerley always said "going off" for "going on." He said, "There's five German battlecruisers up there and we've been having a crack at them."

Fazackerley said, "Well thanks very much, sir. I knew summat were up because you damn near pulled the guts out of her a while back. Are we clear now, sir?"

"For the moment. Just a little matter of twenty-odd battleships trying to close us."

"Eee by gum," said Fazackerley. "We'll likely have to keep the kettle on the boil a bit longer, then."

George stood on the grating and watched the sweating stokers.

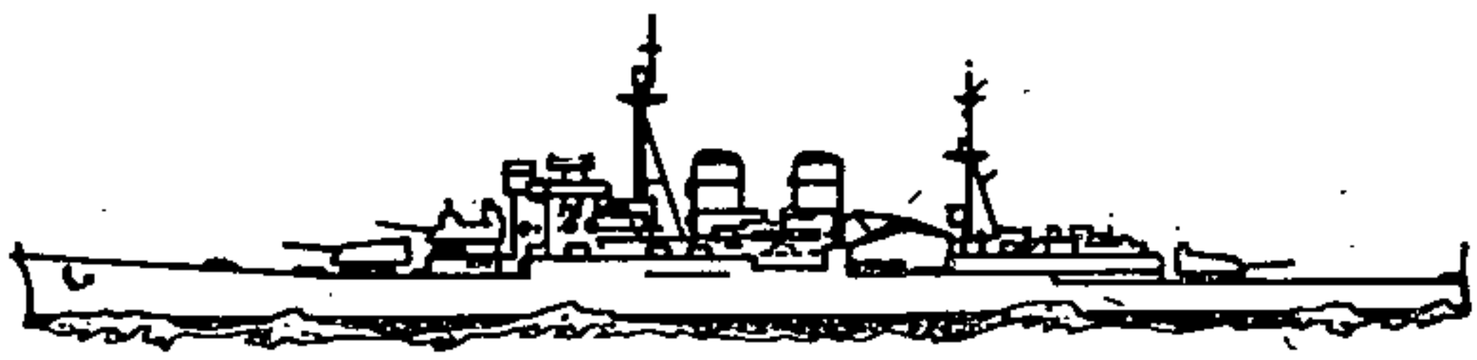
"Yes," he said. "Look, if you want to clean fires, do it

now. Don't wait. The *Lion*'s heading north and the whole German Fleet's chasing us. What they don't know is that Jellicoe is somewhere up there over the horizon with our Battle Fleet, and Beatty's leading the Jerries right into the trap."

Fazackerley swallowed and said, "Aye aye, sir, I see what you mean."

George said, "You can tell the men what I've told you," and left the engine-room.

In any warship, from destroyers to battleships, the majority of ratings served below deck, in noise and heat and stuffy air at the best of times. In action, conditions were scarcely bearable, for the fans sucked in smoke and cordite-fumes and air which was already burning hot when it entered them; in the forepart of the ship, on the upper and lower mess-decks and in the Naval Stores, men were still working in gas masks, water swilling about their feet. The conditions were bad, but the complete lack of news was worse, and as he made his way round the ship George passed the word about the general situation to selected men, who, he knew, would send it flashing round between decks. He omitted to mention the loss of the *Queen Mary* and *Indefatigable*. But he told himself that this was excusable. So far, the Royal Navy was losing this battle —the unthinkable was happening; and George had no intention of deflating the spirits of his men. He reasoned that this was merely the curtain-raiser and that the first act would not begin until Jellicoe got to grips with Scheer, but what if something similar happened then? He thrust the thought out of his mind: that was going altogether too far.



Back on the bridge he noted with satisfaction that some hands were rigging a new screen made from a tarpaulin with a line rove through the eyelets and round the rails of the bridge; others were fixing mattresses over the lower part of the tarpaulin for extra protection. George scanned the horizon and said to Ridgway, "Where the hell's that ship?"

"She's out of sight, sir."

George cursed, imprisoned by the scale of the conflict. Over on the starboard quarter the firing still continued; at least twelve German battleships were engaging the 5th Battle Squadron there, and beyond it Hipper's forces were presumably still in action, though George could see nothing of them through the smoke from Beatty's battlecruisers as the running fight progressed farther and farther to the northward. Then mist patches began to form, and soon afterwards George saw flashes on the horizon, far ahead of the battlecruiser line. They could mean only one thing: cruisers of Jellicoe's advanced screen must have made contact with Hipper's light forces. In a matter of minutes Jellicoe would receive the sighting reports, and then he would deploy his Battle Fleet. George imagined the stately progression of Jellicoe's twenty-four battleships, six squadrons of them steaming by divisions in line abreast, with three or four more battlecruisers if Hood was with the fleet; an incomparable force. And then it would be Jellicoe's task to decide how to deploy his fleet. George would not have cared to be in Jellicoe's shoes while the decision was made.

They skirted the big mist patch which had developed on the starboard beam, then the *Lion* was turning and the flags were fluttering at the yardarms. The *Barham, Valiant, Malaya* and *Warspite* were astern now, still heading in a northerly direction, the first two ships engaging Hipper's fleet and the last two the German Battle Fleet.

The *Nilotic* and the other destroyers with Beatty altered course to eastward to conform with the battlecruisers' movements; and all at once the whole of the northern horizon was alive with ships. Jellicoe had arrived. Some hands in an ammunition party by the forward port ready-use racks were cheering, and soon the sound spread to the rest of the ship above deck. At this point, the Battle Fleet would still have been out of sight of the main German fleet, but Hipper with his battlecruisers would have sighted it.

George felt an unreasoning sense of being caught in an enormous trap as the fleets closed—two British fleets—and the *Nilotic* ran eastward. Beyond Beatty's line Hipper's battlecruisers appeared fitfully, then were lost in the mist, while to the north Jellicoe's great ships were deploying on the port-wing column—the *King George V* leading out with her three consorts in line ahead, then the *Orion* with hers, then the *Iron Duke* and her squadron; the *Benbow* and three more battleships; the *Colossus* with three more; and the *Marlborough*

with yet another three. The ships were ghostly shapes, majestic yet wraith-like in the haze, and from horizon to horizon stretched the smaller vessels of the light forces.

The wind was still west-south-west; in a moment of calm George heard a snatch of song filtering from somewhere below, a nasal voice with a strong Liverpool accent belonging to somebody who had probably never been above decks since the battlecruiser action had started, and who would remain below decks till the main fleet action had finished, provided he was still alive. The tune was *The Girl I Left Behind Me*:

"Oh, I don't give a knock for the skipper of the top
Or the killick of the workin'-party:
I'll be out with a whore by half-past four
'Cos I'm a Jack-me-hearty."

Not exactly a clarion call to battle, George reflected. Be that as it might, it was to this song, for the *Nilotic*, that the Battlecruiser Fleet and the Battle Fleet merged, and became the Grand Fleet.

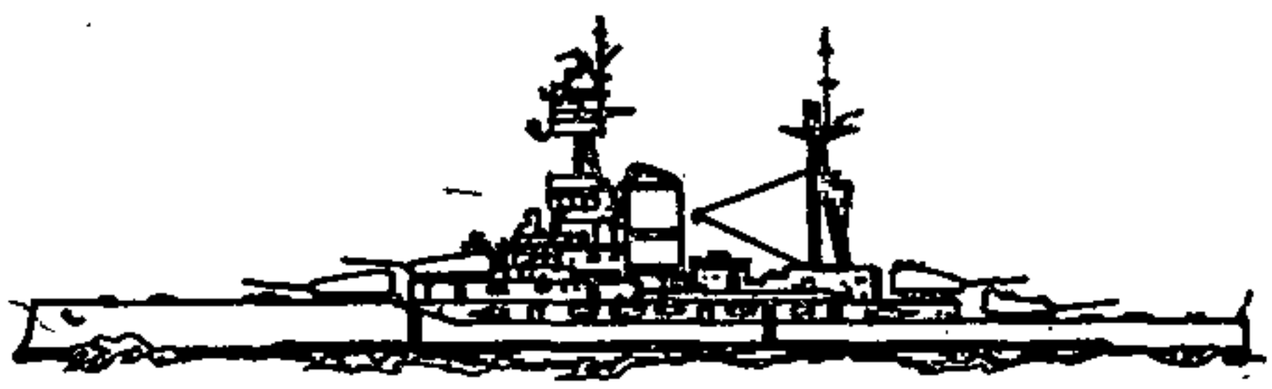
The *Lion*, smoke streaming from a hole in her port side, obscured George's view to southward, but the battlecruisers were still engaging the enemy as Jellicoe deployed so as to form astern of the battlecruisers on a course south-east-by-east. The German Battle Fleet was hidden in the mist farther south, while to eastward three new British battlecruisers were tearing straight for Beatty's. It was Hood, sent on to support Beatty: the *Invincible, Inflexible, Indomitable*. They turned away to starboard, then held on to a south-easterly course as Beatty ordered Hood to take station ahead.

Away to the rear of Beatty's line and on the *Nilotic*'s starboard quarter, the 5th Battle Squadron was making a wide turn to port astern of the *Marlborough* as she deployed astern of Jellicoe's squadron. Something had gone wrong with the *Warspite*. Not only had she turned to starboard instead of port, right across the path of the *Malaya*, but she was also continuing the turn; she must almost have grazed the *Valiant*'s hull.

The *Marlborough* opened fire; the *Warspite* carried on turning, the enemy shells hitting her again and again.

George's flotilla was under Jellicoe's orders now, left behind by the battlecruisers as they forged eastward. The guns of the battleships thundered, thundered; Beatty's force passed out of sight, and George found himself right out of the action, steaming third in a long line of destroyers first on the starboard quarter, and then on the port quarter, of the *St. Vincent*,

the last battleship in Jellicoe's line. Werner and the *Sachsen* might have been twenty miles away for all George knew; a heart-rending situation for him.



Over on the *Nilotic*'s starboard beam the crippled *Warspite* was pulling out of the fight, still under heavy fire from the German battleships, now invisible to George away to the south-west; all he could see through the bunch of armoured cruisers, light cruisers and destroyers on that side was the *Warspite* hull-down, the waterspouts of shell from the unseen ships falling round her. Earlier George had seen a flash in the sky to the southward, and a few minutes later it had been followed by an enormous explosion farther to the east, but there was no news now, nothing much to be seen except the shapes of British ships, the clouds of smoke hanging over the grey sea, and the mist patches which now thickened, now dispersed, and ever and again the flash and blossom of exploding shell as the fleets played their titanic blind-man's-buff.

Ridgway was becoming enthusiastic. He said, "Jellicoe's got them in the bag. They're to westward now, and we're between them and their base. My goodness, sir, what a chance!" He paused, then began to quote:

> "The Day has dawned, the Day's at hand
> We have awaited long:
> Thy servants, Lord, Thy faithful band
> Hear now Thy firing-gong!
>
> The gate of Hell shall yawn today
> Ere ever we break troth;
> Our targets founder in the spray
> That bodies forth Thy wrath!
>
> We work Thy will, O Lord, and ask
> That mists flee from Thy sun,
> Until the night falls on a——"

George had gripped him by the arm, and his voice tailed off as he looked in astonishment at his captain.

"Shut up," George said.

Ridgway gaped at him, then said with a touch of defiance, "That's a very popular poem, sir. Chap called 'Stentor' wrote it."

George said, "If you quote anything like that in this ship again I'll throw you overboard myself. If you want to quote anything"—his voice had risen—"listen to this: 'Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just, and locked up in steel, though he but naked': do you hear, Pilot? *D'you hear?*"

"Yes, sir," Ridgway said. "But it comes to the same thing. I mean, what I said, and what you said."

He turned away, resentful, watching the line of Jellicoe's ships, the grey titans, a dwindling perspective of shadows lighted by the flashing salvoes.

George clenched his fists. Ridgway hadn't got the point at all. Then he relaxed. He was being unfair: how could his Navigating Officer be expected to understand the difference between the portentous religiosity of "Stentor" and Shakespeare's direct statement, which George felt personally applicable? Ridgway had watched the *Sachsen* go out of sight without reporting the event to George; but in fact there was nothing that Ridgway could have done about it; he was as much a prisoner of the enormous fleets' complex movements as George was: more so, since he was not in command and had no inkling of what was at the back of his captain's mind.

George hesitated. Should he confide in Ridgway, unburden himself to the man? Almost at once he decided that this might be unwise; it was certainly unnecessary. On the other hand, he could not afford to have his Navigating Officer in a fit of the sulks. He had better mollify Ridgway.

"Pilot."

Ridgway had gone to stand at the port side of the little bridge by the messenger; against the westering light beyond him, the last eyelet of the improvised dodger glinted gold forward of the erect Indian-club shape of a signal rocket. The ship heaved in the crossed wakes of the heavy units.

"Sir?"

He came forward, and George searched for words which came with difficulty to him.

"Look, Pilot," he said at last. "Don't take to heart what I said. What got my goat was all that stuff about mist. Just look at it."

Ridgway brightened and said, "Oh, I see, sir. Yes, it's damned annoying, that mist."

He stood again companionably by George's side, then they became preoccupied with keeping station; the fleet was turning by divisions to the south-eastward, and the firing died away. They passed a hanging smoke cloud, presumably from the smaller of the two explosions heard earlier, then saw on the starboard beam the blazing wreck of a ship, a German light cruiser.

Ridgway said, "Look, sir, right away beyond that ship."

Gazing towards the south they made out a long smudge, dark, impenetrable, and no more ships, no orange flickers. George hammered the rail with an open hand and cursed.

"They've run for it," he said bitterly.

Scheer gone, Hipper gone, Werner and the *Sachsen* faded in the smoke. Was this, after all, the end—Werner escaping with the High Seas Fleet, and he himself standing impotently gazing at the long empty smudge on the horizon.

Oblivious of Ridgway he said, "No, this can't be the end. By Christ, Moby Dick won't be in it; I'll hunt the bastard down if I have to chase him over the Seven Seas. If this battle's finished there'll still be others. There'll be time."

Ridgway stared unspeaking as George looked at his watch, the blued steel half-hunter on his wrist that had ticked away so much time: the white dial, the roman numerals black save for twelve o'clock, which was picked out in red.

"There'll be time," George said.

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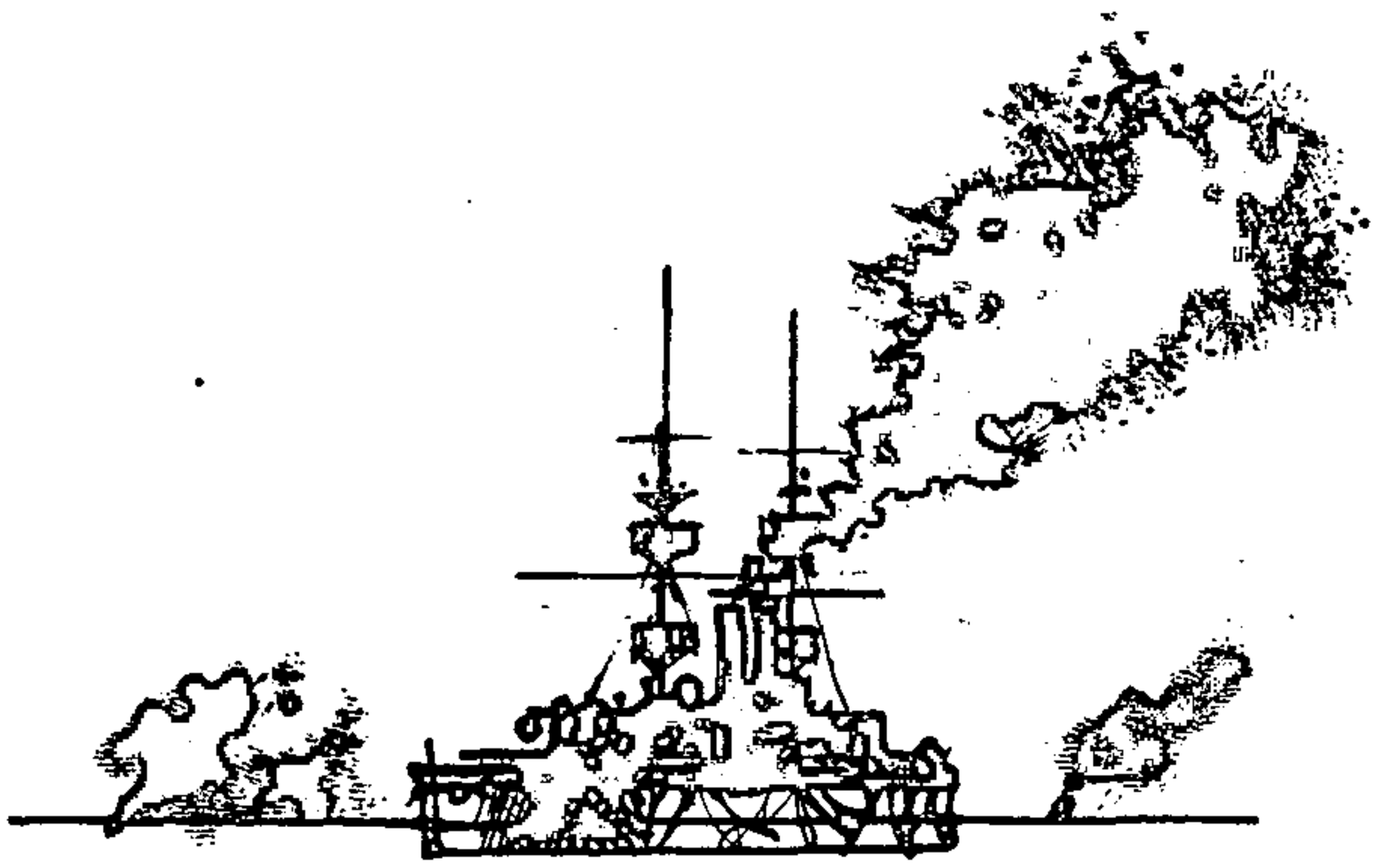
From the book "The Grey Seas of Jutland," published by Hutchinson at 25s.



by Tom Macdonald

THE TUSK

There was nothing to show he'd been on safari

I HAD often heard that Mitchell Grant had been among the greatest of the elephant hunters in Africa, in places as far apart as Angola and the valley of the Sabi in Southern Rhodesia, just across the border from the Transvaal. And of course in the lands dominated by the everlasting snow crown of old Kilimanjaro.

I heard from the barman in the pub at Gravelotte, near the antimony mine, in the land where you have to look out that wandering giraffe don't jump over the bonnet of your car, that Grant was living in the Kloof, near the country of Modjadji, the Rain Queen.

I decided to call on him.

I told Van Tonder, the barman, so.

Van, a podge of a man with washed-out eyes, said: "I don't think he'll be talking about his hunting days. Avoids it somehow. You wouldn't think to look at him, man, that he'd ever killed an elephant."

I drove out of the dusty Olifants plain into the hill country of pines and gums. Millions of gums, tall and straight, and they gave the impression that they were growing in Australia and not in the Northern Transvaal. But the Australian gums had taken to the Transvaal hills just as if they were planted in their own country.

There was a massive avenue of trees leading up to Grant's farm, and when I neared the homestead, I saw an orchard of avocadoes and a grove golden with oranges. Two big hunting

dogs came barking at my car. But they soon began to wag their tails.

A spare, lithe, white-haired man came to meet me. His face was sun-lined and his blue eyes were keen. Grant was as friendly as his hounds.

I told him my name.

"You're the writer," he said.

I nodded. "Nice place you have, and the avocadoes are laden."

"They just leap up when you plant them in this rich loam," he said. He took a pipe from the pocket of his immaculate white bush jacket. "I grow my own tobacco," he said. He opened his pouch and said, "Try some."

I sniffed the dark tobacco and packed my pipe with it. I took a few draws and it tasted milder than its colour had indicated.

"It's good," I said.

"With care and affection you can do anything with tobacco," he said.

We walked back to the stoep and I was introduced to Mrs. Grant, a small, rosy woman. They were about the same age. There was some wonderment in both of them. Innocence, perhaps. Something I really couldn't put my finger on.

Tea was brought in by an African girl, regal in bearing although she padded around on bare feet. She fitted into the whole atmosphere. But I felt there was something missing on the stoep. No heads of game, no dead eyes, no leopard masks, no tusks.

When the girl had gone again, I said: "She looks like a queen."

"She comes from the Modjadji country," said Mrs. Grant. "But you know the Rain Queen and her country?"

"The queen of myths," I said.

"The Balobedu is a rare tribe," said Grant. "You don't believe that the Queen can make rain?"

"It's just a legend," I said. "I grant you that the myth of her power is as strong as a rope with her people."

Grant smiled over the rim of his teacup. "I went to her once when the drought had us by the throat," he said. "She promised rain, and it came. I like to think that she had something to do with milking the udders of the sky-cows."

I smiled back at him.

The hounds lay sprawled on the concrete of the stoep. "They could run a buck to death," I said, nodding at them.

"We have buck on the farm, but our dogs don't hunt them. They were brought up as pups with small buck."

He stood up and whistled. The dogs' ears shot up, then flopped back. We heard the sound of little hooves. A bushbuck ewe came bounding up the steps. She went straight to the sugar bowl and licked up all the sugar. She was all of a soft brown, with melting eyes. The white bar across her chest looked like a parson's collar. All the time she was eating the sugar her ears and her bushy tail flicked. Then she lay down near the dogs.

I accepted the Grants' offer to stay the night. In the house there wasn't anything to show that Grant had been a hunter. Not a leopard or a lion pelt on the floor. Not a bit of ivory anywhere in the house of a man they still talked of in the bars in Nairobi. Nothing to show he had ever been on safari or had shared the camp fires when hunters talked of their gambles with death.

After dinner we talked of many things. Mrs. Grant left us. I drank Grant's whisky and went on smoking his tobacco. The summer night was hot. The cicadas and the crickets were madly singing their own praises.

When I got the chance, I said: "I'm told you never talk about your days as a great elephant man."

He said behind his pipe smoke: "You must have heard it in one of the pubs."

"Yes," I said. "In the Lowveld, the pub is the pulse of the people's thinking."

"Perhaps," he said. "But why should I waste my time telling my story to bar flies? They wouldn't understand. The trigger-happy bastards. They shoot anything on four legs. They would only be interested in tales of slaughter."

"Slaughter?" I said.

"They want you to set their blood pumping with stories about the mighty fall of the old monarchs. That's what elephants are—monarchs."

"But slaughter?" I repeated.

"Hunting is murder," he said quietly. "No animal will attack a man unless it's wounded. Whenever I hear of a hunter killed by a buffalo, I rejoice."

"But you were a mighty Nimrod," I said.

"A great killer," he said. "There is a great deal of difference, you know."

He paused to fill his pipe. He lit it and puffed out the

match. "You see, I had no reason to kill elephants for ivory or for meat because I had money enough—my father was a gold tycoon in old Johannesburg. I thought that we were fairly evenly matched, because the elephant is the wisest and most powerful animal in the world. But I didn't consider that the advantage was mine because of the high power of my guns. I had a complete arsenal, beautiful Wesley Richards, Winchesters, Mausers—those were the heavies; and in the lightweights I had .256's, the .22, and the Hornets. The range of bullets went up to .600. One thing I never did, never used hunting-scopes. Thought it unsportsmanlike."

We filled the short gaps of silence with clouds of tobacco smoke.

"I had a change of heart," he said. "One night I was in camp with a good collection of ivory. A herd of elephant came charging into the camp, scattering my boys and sending me into the bush for safety. An old cow was the last to leave and she was carrying away one of the tusks. She pounded away with the tusk twined in her trunk. In the morning I saw that the missing tusk had belonged to a bull I had shot a few days before. One of the two tusks had been broken, in a fight I supposed, and I had only taken the good one.

"I spoored the herd and found the tusk. The cow was feeding with the others. Whenever she moved, she picked up the tusk. Whenever she fed, she laid it down near her. That went on the whole day. I couldn't fire a shot. The cow went into the evening with her secret."

"To the graveyard of the elephants," I suggested.

"There is no graveyard," he said. "It's a myth. But I knew she would go on carrying that tusk. I also knew that no other tusk would have satisfied her. I couldn't prove it, but I knew. She was like a woman who was carrying away some token of her dead lover. After that, I never shot another elephant."

"That's why you haven't kept a sliver of ivory," I said, with sudden insight.

He nodded with the pipe in his mouth. "I had a tobacco jar once, carved out of ivory. I had a museum of pieces. I had to get rid of them all because they were reminders of murders. You see, there was the picture I could never forget ... the cow carrying in the everlasting silences of bush and forest the tusk of the bull ... carrying it on and on, God knows where."

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BY CHRISTIAN MILLER

GIRL ON THE TOP FLOOR

TALL, slim and elegant, like a girl in a beauty-contest poised before the judges, the new office block rose above the haphazard sprawl of factory buildings at the edge of the new industrial estate. James Dormer, standing in the forecourt and tilting his head backwards so as to study the building's full height, got the unpleasant feeling that it was going to fall on top of him. He told himself firmly that this was just an optical illusion, caused by the clouds that were racing backwards over the roof-line and, tucking his briefcase more firmly under his arm, he advanced decisively towards the plate-glass door.

Top floor, Bill Beckman had said, when they had spoken on the telephone the previous day. "And don't bother to ask at the front desk, old boy," Bill had shouted cordially down the long-distance line. "Just come right up to my office."

How it oiled the wheels, thought James, to have been in the same unit with people like Bill. True, Bill was now a top executive while he, James, remained a humble sales representative, but nothing could take away the fact that they had square-bashed and blancoed their way together round half the world.

Alone in the push-button lift, James straightened his tie and mentally ran over the sales-talk that he employed when presenting the details of his company's duplicating-machines to prospective buyers. Not that he'd actually use the patter on old Bill—they probably wouldn't even discuss business during this first meeting. Still, just in case, he might

as well have all the details ready marshalled in his mind.

The automatic doors of the lift opened in front of him, and he stepped out into what appeared to be a private lobby. A deep fir-green carpet stretched from panelled wall to panelled wall. Expensively-framed oil paintings, indirectly lit, hung on the walls, and a spotlight shone down on a florist's arrangement of out-of-season blooms which stood on a small walnut table. Opposite the lift, equally advantageously lit by a shaded desk-light, stood a larger walnut table, and behind the table sat one of the prettiest girls James had ever seen in his life.

"Good morning, sir," said the vision, smiling at James and, at the same time—with the automatic reflex of a pretty girl unexpectedly confronted by a handsome man—brushing her hair off her face with the back of her hand. "What can I do for you?"

James smiled back. Lucky old Bill, he thought—an office like this, and a secretary like this, too. Out loud he said, "I've come to see Mr. Beckman. I haven't got an appointment but we talked yesterday, and he's expecting me."

For a moment the girl looked puzzled. "Mr. Beckman?"

"This *is* his office, isn't it? He told me to come up to the top floor."

The girl's big, black-lashed eyes dropped momentarily to some papers that lay on the table.

"Oh yes, sir, of course. Do forgive me." She hesitated, and then went on, "I'm awfully sorry, but Mr. Beckman is out just at the moment. Would you care to wait? I'm expecting him back quite soon."

James debated. Should he make another call on the estate and come back later?

Seemingly sensing his indecision, the girl asked quickly, "Would you care to sit down, sir? And what name shall I say, when Mr. Beckman gets back?"

She stood up and came round to James' side of the table, revealing that her figure was just as pretty as her face. "Over here, sir." She indicated a low, leather-covered chair. "Would you like something to read, while you're waiting?"

She seems extraordinarily anxious that I shouldn't go away, thought James, sitting down. "Dormer's the name," he said, and then added, realising that he hadn't answered her second question, "don't bother to get me anything—I've got some papers I ought to go through."

And he unzipped his briefcase and started, quite unnecessarily, to study some of the documents that were in it. The

truth was, he wanted time to collect himself; the girl was so very pretty she had quite knocked him off his balance. Over the top of a leaflet about a new photo-copier he studied her unobtrusively.

She had seated herself again behind the table. Her small head with its cloudy dark hair was bent over some papers that she was annotating, and the creaminess of her pale skin looked almost transparent in the reflected light of the desk-lamp. Feeling faintly ashamed of himself, James let his eyes stray under the table and discovered happily that her legs, crossed discreetly just above the knee, were long and slim. He sighed contentedly and sat back in his chair. Silence reigned.

After about five minutes James could bear it no longer. Giving up all pretence of studying his papers, he said, "Nice office you've got here."

The girl looked up gratefully, as if she, too, had been longing to start a conversation.

"Oh *yes*; isn't it? It's really marvellous." And she looked around her with obvious pleasure, as if it was all she could do to stop herself actually stroking the mellow panelling.

"Been here long?" James asked, fishing in his hip-pocket for his cigarette-case. He got out a cigarette and tapped the end.

The girl hesitated before answering. "Ever since the place was built." Somehow she had seemed worried by the question.

James looked at her for a moment and then jumped from his chair. "So sorry—how rude of me. Do you smoke?" And he offered her his cigarette-case.

She shook her head, but the move gave him the excuse to perch on the edge of her table rather than return to the chair. He had an absurd urge to study her at close quarters; there was something about her that puzzled him.

"How long do you think Mr. Beckman is likely to be?" he asked.

The girl's big grey eyes looked up at him. "Oh, don't go yet," she begged. "I'm sure he won't be long."

James had a sudden intuition. "Look here," he said quietly. "You haven't got the slightest idea *when* he'll be back, have you? Why are you trying to keep me here?"

For a moment he thought she was going to burst into tears. She glanced round the room and half moved as if she were going to run. Then she thought better of it, sank back into her chair, fished a small handkerchief out of her sleeve and blew her nose.

"How did you guess?" she asked, in a voice so low that it was almost a whisper.

James held out his cigarette-case again. This time she took one; the nails on her slim fingers were pale, unvarnished. In the silence the click of his lighter sounded unnaturally loud. She inhaled deeply and tried to smile; compared with her bright professional smiles of a few minutes before, the smile was not much of a success, although to James' taste it was infinitely more appealing.

"How did you guess?" she repeated more calmly.

"I don't know," James answered frankly. "But how about telling me what the game is?"

His words were rough but the tone in which he said them was gentle; she looked up at him and seemed to decide that she could trust him.

"I get so lonely," she said simply.

"Lonely?" he queried.

"Yes, all by myself, up here. Before I came here, I used to work with a lot of other girls—a whole crowd of us, and other people were always popping in and out, too. It was sort-of friendly. Whereas here..." Her glance wandered round the windowless walls, and she shrugged her shoulders as if she could not find the right words.

"But you said only a moment ago that you thought it was a marvellous place."

"Oh, but it *is* marvellous. I've always wanted to work somewhere like this. All us girls want to—as soon as we start work in a typing-pool, we begin dreaming about the day when we'll be someone's private secretary and have a place like this all to ourselves. It's heavenly here, really it is."

James swung his leg down from the desk. Typical woman, he thought—thinks she knows what she wants and then, when she gets it, doesn't want it. He felt a sudden flash of irritation, quickly dispelled by the evident distress on the girl's face.

"You're not going, are you?" she asked anxiously.

"Well, I am, actually," he said, as kindly as he could. "I've only got two days here and I have to make the most of them. Tell Mr. Beckman that I'll get in touch, will you? And," he turned, his finger already on the lift-button, and smiled at her, "if you're really worried about that loneliness, how about having dinner with me tonight? I don't know a soul here and it seems a pity to waste that nice cocktail-bar at the Leofric. We could get rid of our loneliness together. Eight o'clock? In the bar?"

As the lift doors closed on him he saw her smile and raise her hand from the desk in a gesture of assent. He knew she would be there.

It was barely seven forty-five when James, freshly bathed and wearing a clean shirt, walked into the bar; he wanted to have a quick one before she arrived, to shake off the tiredness of the day.

He also wanted to think.

He ordered a double whisky and drank it slowly, turning over in his mind his conversation with the girl. He had only meant it as a joke, when he had asked her to share his loneliness, but as the day had worn on he had become aware that his casual remark had a lot of unconscious truth behind it. For he was, he had to admit to himself, a very lonely man. No wife, no family—and almost, because of the incessant travelling that his work demanded—no friends. Friends couldn't be expected to put up with a man who could never be relied on to turn up for a party, no matter how far ahead he was invited; friends weren't keen on someone whose telephone was either almost permanently occupied with business calls or else rang, bleak and unanswered, in an empty flat; friends—but he just hadn't *got* any real friends. A mass of acquaintances, yes—a dozen names in every town who knew his name in return—but friends, no. And, he realised, he could do with a friend. Specifically, a girl friend.

Now that he had admitted this to himself he felt a sudden sense of relief, and the girl, when she came in exactly on the dot of eight, found him relaxed and smiling. She climbed up on the stool that he had been keeping for her.

"Good lord, you *are* cold," he remarked, as he helped slip her jacket off her shoulders. It was as if she had an invisible aura of icy air around her. "Is it freezing, outside?"

She didn't reply. She just looked at him, happiness shining out of her eyes, and after a moment she said, without really answering his question, "I'm warm now."

"Yes," he said, and smiled at her. "You're warm now." And in that instant he knew that he was falling in love.

He was awakened the next morning at seven by the telephone ringing. He put out a groping hand.

"James? Hello, you old rascal—Bill here. I guessed I'd find you in the best dump in town! I thought you were arriving yesterday—why didn't you call me?"

James sat up and tried to think. He'd forgotten to ask the wonderful girl... what was her name? For heaven's sake, he'd never even found out what her name was! And he'd forgotten to ask her if she'd seen Bill...

"...wonder if you'd like to come out to our place for dinner tonight? Sally would love to see you. Sorry to call you so early but I'm flying to Brussels for the day, so tonight would be our only chance."

Damn, damn, thought James—I wanted to see her again tonight. But then, quickly collecting himself—"Fine, Bill. Yes, I'd be delighted."

And he switched on the bedside light and searched for a pen to write down the address. After all, he was supposed to be there on business, and who was he to turn down a dinner-party at the home of a managing director? But damn, all the same.

He got up and shaved, cursing himself for his stupidity in not finding out the girl's name. Cocktails, dinner, dancing—everything about the evening had been exactly right, and the most right thing of all had been the girl herself. Of course, she was pretty, and sweet, and gay—but he had known girls who were all of those things before, so what was it about her that had made him love her instantaneously, without reason? Was it her air of being lost and in need of protection, her confession of her loneliness up there all by herself in the luxury of the top floor? James did not know; all he knew was that he simply couldn't wait to see her again.

He had a dozen calls to make, all on the other side of town. By the time he finished the last one, she would probably have left work, and he didn't know where she lived. The previous evening, she had insisted that she didn't want him to see her home and had run out of the restaurant while he was occupied in getting his coat out of the cloakroom. Much as he had been mystified, he hadn't been particularly perturbed, so sure was he that he would see her the next day.

About ten-thirty, he telephoned the new block and asked to be put through to Mr. Beckman's secretary, but an unknown voice answered. He called again an hour later but the same voice answered. Without knowing his girl's name, how could he get through to her?

He slammed down the receiver.

Of course, the Beckmans had produced a girl for him—the pretty blonde daughter of a neighbour. Poor girl, thought James, as a taxi carried him back to his hotel, she must have thought him an awful bore. He had done his best, but between

talking business with Bill and thinking about his new, elusive love, he just hadn't been able to muster up much interest in her healthy blonde charms. Indeed, it had been all he could do to stop himself questioning Bill about his beautiful secretary, which would hardly have been the height of tact.

He leaned back in the taxi, suddenly conscious of tiredness, and then, impulsively, stretched forward and tapped on the glass. "Could you go past the new office block—the one they call the Tower?"

In the darkness ahead the skyscraper loomed suddenly up like the prow of a liner, cutting through the night air with an impersonal, menacing grace. He craned forward in his seat, but before he had time to locate the exact part that he was seeking, the taxi had carried him to the base of the building, and then past it. He peered out of the back window, but the blue of the anti-dazzle glass gave the whole structure an air of unreality.

I won't leave without seeing her again, he resolved. I'll walk in there tomorrow and fix up some way of meeting her —I just can't let her go, now that I've found her.

The next morning dawned as windy as the day on which he had arrived, but there was no sun. Instead a light, cold rain was falling. As he walked across the forecourt of the skyscraper James shivered involuntarily, and turned up the collar of his coat.

An attendant was standing in the lift, his hand poised over the buttons.

Featherbedding, thought James, with an unwonted touch of irritation, brought on by the nervousness he felt at the prospect of seeing the girl. Why on earth do they have a man to run the lift—one can do it perfectly well by oneself.

"Which floor, sir?" inquired the attendant.

"Top," said James abruptly.

Several more people got in and the lift started upwards, stopping occasionally to let them off. Then James was alone with the attendant. The lift stopped again and the doors opened, revealing a typical office floor divided up by glass-topped partitions.

"Top floor," intoned the attendant.

James didn't move.

"Didn't you want the top, sir?" The man's nasal voice jarred on James' already taut nerves.

"Yes, but . . ."

"This *is* the top, sir."

Puzzled, James stepped out. The lift doors closed behind him. The girl at the desk nearest the lift grinned cheekily at him; she had a pert, know-all face that he found most unattractive.

"I'm looking for Mr. Beckman's office," he began coldly. "I think the liftman has left me at the wrong floor."

"No, this is it. Through the door at the end."

Mystified, James crossed the floor. Sure enough, a varnished door bore the words *W. Beckman—Managing Director* and in smaller letters the word PRIVATE.

James retraced his steps.

"Has Mr. Beckman got another office in the building?" he asked the girl.

"What on earth would he be wanting with another office?"

"Are you sure?"

"Sure I'm sure—I'm his secretary."

James turned his back on her and stabbed his finger decisively against the lift-button. But before the lift came he noticed that above the door, in the place where a little light came on to indicate the direction in which the lift was travelling, there was only an arrow pointing down.

He turned on his heel with mounting disbelief and walked at right angles to the lift; as he expected, he came to a second lift, a twin of the first. But in front of this one also there was a utilitarian office, with a regimented lay-out of desks and filing cabinets.

The girls at their typewriters looked up at him curiously as he strode past.

"How do I get to the top floor?" he inquired.

One of the typists looked up. "Through the doors at the end," she said, "but . . ."

He didn't wait to hear the end of her sentence, but ran to the doors that she had indicated, and pushed them open. A steep flight of bare concrete steps faced him. He felt a sense of panic. Where was the floor with the soft carpet and the panelling and his girl?

He ran to the concrete stairs, almost colliding with an elderly charwoman who was rummaging in a cupboard. He tried to quieten his breathing; "Please, which is the way to the top floor? I'm looking for Mr. Beckman's office—the one with the pictures in it, the pictures and the flowers."

The old cleaner looked at him in a puzzled way. "I'm not sure of the gentlemen's names, I'm afraid, but there's nothing

up here, only the roof. They were going to build another floor but then they changed their minds. So it's just the roof —proper dangerous, it is, too."

He stared at the wrinkled face with mounting horror. "Dangerous?"

"Oh yes, dear. There was a shocking accident, only just after the place opened. Some of the young ladies from the typing-pool went up to look at the view, and one of the poor things, she fell off. No rails round the edge. A real shame it was—such a pretty young girl, too. Oh, don't you go up there, now . . ."

But James did not hear her. As if in a dream, he walked up the hard, steep stairs and pushed open the steel door at the top. The wind, hurtling across the flat roof, struck him as he stepped out.

It was true, what the cleaner had said—there was no guard-rail round the edge of the roof, only, between flimsy-looking metal uprights, a single strand of wire that hung slackly about two feet above the tiles. On hands and knees, the wind tearing at his hair, he crawled to the edge of the roof and looked over.

The drop sickened him.

He stumbled back to the door, his mind numb. How desolate it was up there, he thought despairingly, how lonely. Lonely, lonely—the words echoed in his brain.

Where was she now, his love, his girl? He put out his hands, as if to try and reach her, but his fingers met only the cold air. The wind, sighing through the wires around the roof, made a thin, sad noise, like the sound of a young girl crying.

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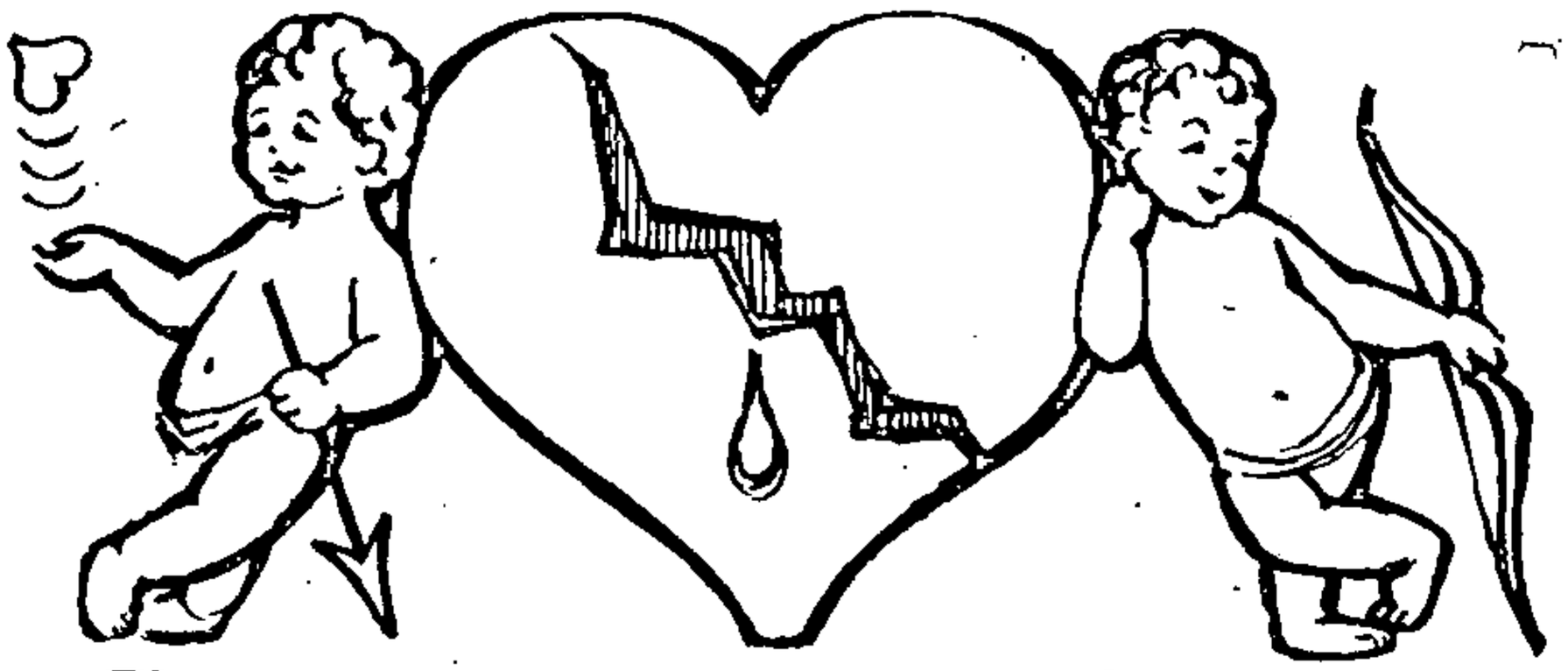
SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (AUGUST ISSUE)

Across. 1, *Flimsy*. 4, *Improved*. 9, *Amelia*. 10, *Skittles*. 12, *Jilt*. 13, *Solid*. 14, *Mere*. 17, *Castle Rising*. 20, *Demoralising*. 23, *Alan*. 24, *Stops*. 25, *Left*. 28, *Sidereal*. 29, *Put out*. 30, *Repartee*. 31, *Globes*.

Down. 1, *Flapjack*. 2, *Idealist*. 3, *Slip*. 5, *Make it snappy*. 6, *Rota*. 7, *Velvet*. 8, *Dashed*. 11, *Board of Trade*. 15, *Fleer*. 16, *Antic*. 18, *Time-bomb*. 19, *Agitates*. 21, *Hawser*. 22, *Hard up*. 26, *Brer*. 27, *Pull*.



LOVE-GAMME

I set my jacket on the ground and knelt beside her.

"May I say goodbye to you now—here?"

She slowly turned her dark eyes towards me.

"Are you going to give me something to remember you by?" she asked.

"What would you like me to give you?"

"You know very, very well what I would like you to give me."

I kissed her forehead. "Goodbye, Matilda . . ."

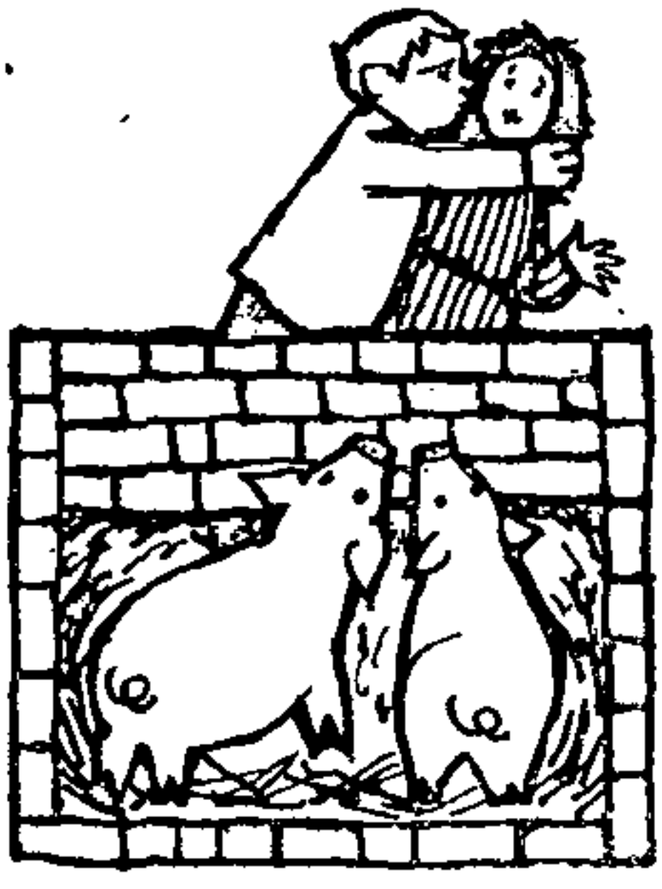
"That wasn't much to remember you by," she said. "I'm forgetting it already."

I put my arms round her and kissed her again, on the lips . . .

"That won't last very long, either," she said.

"I'm sorry, but what else can I give you? . . . I'm catching the 6.48 from Flaxfield Junction, and it's now ten minutes to six. Goodbye, Tilly . . ."

JOHN HADFIELD, *Love on a Branch Line*



BUSS-STOP

Bessie Bighead, hired help, born in the workhouse, smelling of the cowshed, snores bass and gruff on a couch of straw in a loft in Salt Lake Farm and picks a posy of daisies in Sunday meadow to put on the grave of Gomer Owen who kissed her once by the pig-sty when she wasn't looking and never kissed her again although she was looking all the time.

DYLAN THOMAS, *Under Milk Wood*

"Tell me, Ali," she (Evangeline) said. "Why do we never see our lord? Is he so monstrous that he dare not show himself?"

"On the contrary," said Ali; "he is particularly handsome."

"Doesn't he care for women, then?"

Ali's gesture embraced the entire harem. He did not think it necessary to reply.

"When shall I see him, then?"

"Your curiosity," was the reply, "is almost indiscreet. The Master would no doubt be flattered by it. But it would not turn him from his purpose . . . he selects the bride of a night not by the glance of desire but by the eye of calculation . . . he never permits himself to anticipate a pleasure, but always takes the next on the list. Fortunately he is young—"

"And where do I come on the list?" asked Evangeline with an obscure sentiment of indignation.

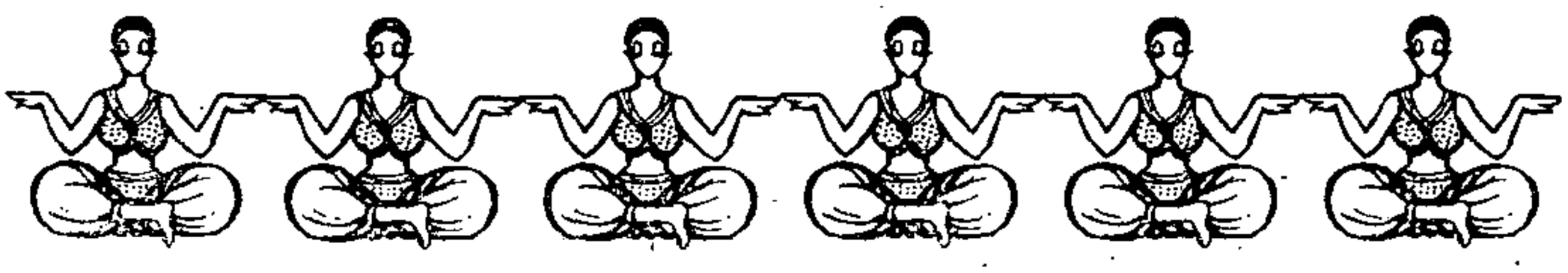
"I purchased three hundred slaves," said the eunuch. "shortly before your arrival."

"And I come after them?"

"Precisely."

Evangeline would have found it hard to justify even to herself, the extraordinary sense of depression which now settled upon her spirits. She saw before her a long vista of uneventful days, and nights even less eventful . . .

JAMES LAVER, *Nymph Errant*



WINSOME JOHNNY

O but he was as fair as a garden in flower,
As slender and tall as the great Eiffel Tower,
When the waltz throbbed out on the long promenade
O his eyes and his smile they went straight to my heart;
"O marry me, Johnny, I'll love and obey":
But he frowned like thunder and he went away.

W. H. AUDEN,
Oh the Valley in the Summer Where I and My John

So Near and Yet So Far

He took me out to see the stars . . .
He said there were two moons near Mars
While Jupiter had four.
I thought of course he'd whisper soon
What fourfold bliss 'twould be
To stroll beneath that fourfold moon
On Jupiter with me . . .
But no, he talked a dreary mess,
Of which the only fraction
That caught my fancy, I confess,
Was "mutual attraction."
I said I thought it very queer
And stupid altogether,
For stars to keep so very near,
And yet not come together.
At that he smiled, and turned his head;
I thought he'd caught the notion.
He merely bowed good night and said,
Their safety lay in motion.

ESTHER B. TIFFANY,
Applied Astronomy

Plunge Line

"José," I said. "That singer with the rumba band . . ."

"Yes, Mr. Cord. I know. She'll be at your place in half an hour."

I put down the telephone and walked back to the table. I took the bottle to the window with me while I filled my glass . . .

A knock came on the door.

"Come in," I called.

She came into the room, her dark eyes bright, her long black hair falling down her back almost to her hips, the black gown cut way down in front showing white almost to her navel. She smiled at me.

"Hello, Mr. Cord," she said, without the accent she used in the café. "How nice of you to ask me up."

"Take off your dress and have a drink," I said.

"I'm not that kind of girl," she snapped.

HAROLD ROBBINS,
The Carpetbaggers

ALISTAIR MACLEAN IS BACK

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WHEN EIGHT BELLS TOLL

This time MacLean's man is Philip Calvert, agent for the British Naval Intelligence, the man who says: "I eat all the right foods, take plenty of exercise and, even although no insurance company in the world will look at me, their medical men would pass me any time, but even so I couldn't tear that gun away. The hand that had looked like marble felt like marble, only colder. I'd smelled death all right . . ."

EXCLUSIVE SERIALISATION OF MACLEAN'S EXCITING NEW BOOK BEGINS IN NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY

October Argosy, on sale Friday, September 9. Price 3/6

THE POWER

HOUSE

FINAL INSTALMENT

BY WILLIAM HAGGARD

Back-bench M.P. VICTOR DEMUTH'S attempt to defect behind the Iron Curtain was disastrous. The Communists, deciding he was worthless, sent him back. CHARLES RUSSELL, of Security Executive, managed to foil Demuth's subsequent suicide-bid and hid him in a nursing-home until Press speculation should die down. Russell was also interested in Demuth's daughter, GINA, whose boyfriend, BOB SNAKE, was his nephew and a croupier at Stacks gaming-club. ROBERT FLETCHER, the Prime Minister, was anxious about the Demuth affair, as a scandal could oust him from office; ruthlessly, he had tipped Russell off about Demuth in the first place, using JAMES MOTT, owner of Stacks, as his go-between. On the other hand, "THE SQUIRE," publisher of *The Freeman* and bitter critic of the P.M., was after the Demuth story at all costs—and he also owned The Commodore, rival gaming-club to Stacks. HAGEN, tough manager of The Commodore, hired two thugs, whom Chief Superintendent HAROLD PELL was watching with interest. Sensing there might be trouble at his club, James Mott phoned Bob Snake at Gina's flat. A man answered, saying he was from the police —but then, Mott heard Gina scream . . .

JIMMY MOTT ran for his car. He kept it outside the block of flats and was fined once a week for obstruction or wrongful parking. He paid the fines indifferently, regarding them as another tax. His flat was at most a mile from where Gina lived and he knew the area thoroughly. He made it in two minutes flat at the cost of some waving fists and a buckled fender.

The house door opened into a drably-painted hall and he gave the nameboard a glance without stopping to read it carefully . . . Gina Demuth, second floor.

He ran up the narrow stairs. The door was shut and he

rapped on it sharply, then felt the door. It was a fine Victorian door.

He charged it solidly with his fifteen stone, changed shoulders and charged again. The third time the old lock parted and he was through.

Two men were facing him, one shorter than the other. The taller looked frightened but the shorter was smiling. On the sofa a girl moaned softly, recovering consciousness.

Jimmy Mott didn't hesitate. He wasn't a Karate-man, he hadn't fought for twenty years, but once he'd done a course in unarmed combat. He picked the taller man first and rushed him, feinting at his head, then as his hands came up, dropping him with an appalling felon's blow. The tall man collapsed, bending double like a jack knife. Jimmy Mott stumbled over him and the cosh caught him glancingly.

It took most of the steam from him but somehow he got up again. The short man was standing lightly, balanced forward, watching the reeling Mott. His smile was very queer and his glassy eyes looked sightless. He was thinking this was his lucky day. His peculiar gods had sent him this beefy brute as a consolation for losing the girl. He put the cosh away deliberately, feeling in his pocket. He found the knuckleduster, put his fingers through, bringing his hands out armed.

He began to cut Mott up—it wasn't hard. Mott was forty-five, no match for a young professional. The first two blows he somehow blocked, but the third slit his right cheek, the fifth the left. The short man stepped back.

"Had enough?"

Somehow Mott reached him but only to receive further punishment. He fell at last and the short man put the boot in.

He turned at last and pulled the tall man erect, cursing him savagely.

"You're a fine one—you're a sissy."

"You saw where he hit me. I—"

"Don't you know the first thing? I'll never go out on a job with your sort again. Can you walk?"

"Perhaps . . . If you help me."

"We'll have to leave the girl."

"Let's go."

Gina waited to hear a car start, then she staggered to the telephone.

The Prime Minister was talking to Charles Russell, who had been giving him a report on Victor Demuth.

"He's pretty bad, under heavy sedation still. They don't think he'll die, but after the emotional strain he's been through they don't think he'll ever be quite the same again."

Fletcher changed the subject. "I've seen the report on that affair down in Fulham. They showed it to me because of Mott. The press is getting quite intolerable—trying to beat a story out of a girl, thugs pretending to be policemen ... The police are doing their best, of course?"

"Of course."

Robert Fletcher said sharply, "Who gave the story to the papers?"

"The police did, Prime Minister."

"Why?"

"To protect the girl. There's no better way of protecting a person than making it public they've already been attacked."

"I see. What was Mott doing there?"

"The lady is the fiancée of one of his croupiers."

"How is he getting on now?"

"Still in a nursing-home but he'll be out of it quite soon."

"I'm glad."

Russell said with feline blandness, "You must find him very useful."

The Prime Minister didn't answer but Russell caught his expression: it was wary, even frightened. He rose unexpectedly and held out his hand.

"Then I think that covers the ground," he said.

Russell left him thoughtfully. In the course of the interview he had learned something: Fletcher was uneasy about Jim Mott; Mott might be loyal, but he knew too much. To anyone familiar with the Prime Minister the corollary was self-evident: give him half a chance, he'd fix Jimmy Mott for good and all. He was that sort of man.

On the day Mott left the nursing-home he made a serious mistake. He went to see the Squire, or more precisely he tried to.

Mott had been on his back for eleven days but his mind had been working. An attempt had been made to wring a story out of Gina Demuth and the man whom that story would most damage was Robert Fletcher. So. And the man who hated Fletcher most was by common knowledge the Squire. Moreover there was another thread. The Squire owned *The Freeman* but he also owned the Commodore, and at the Commodore something was brewing. They had been taking on hard

men, and the obvious use for hard men was against a successful competitor.

It was time Jimmy Mott had a friendly word with the man they called the Squire. They had common interests so why not talk? If the Commodore was slipping he could be thinking in terms of mischief. Anything would be better than open war. Some accommodation should be possible and if the price was right Mott would pay it.

The day he left the nursing-home he rang up the Squire in Norfolk. A woman's voice answered him. Jimmy Mott spoke quite frankly. He told her that his name was Mott and that he ran a gaming-house called Stacks. There was a matter of mutual interest which he'd like to discuss and quickly.

The voice said, "I'll ask my husband."

There was a considerable wait before the voice returned. It said politely, "Mr. Mott? I've spoken to my husband, but this isn't one of his good days. You know he's not well."

"Yes, I know." Mott realised this wasn't a brush-off. She was treating him with courtesy and he responded. "If he could give me an appointment..."

"I wouldn't like to promise one but I'll make a suggestion instead. Are you ringing from London?"

"I am."

"Why don't you have a word with Foleys?" Foleys was the merchant bank which had advised the Squire's family for a century. "I'll ring and make an appointment."

"That's really very kind of you."

"Not at all. Just ask for Mr. Alastair."

Jimmy Mott hung up, grinning. He'd had very much the worst of it but he hadn't been left resentful. So that was Lady Elena. She must be rather a nice woman. He had no hopes at all from an interview with Foleys; he knew them by reputation. But if he didn't go he'd have no hope of reaching the Squire later.

At Foleys it was a good deal worse than he could ever have imagined. They kept him waiting ten minutes, then a languid young man received him, treating his visitor with a formally polite insolence. He understood that Mr. Mott had a proposition. If he would be good enough to state it the young man would undertake that it went forward.

Mott asked bluntly, "Are you a partner?"

"You may take it I have full authority." The young man was very stiff indeed.

"I'd like to see a partner."

"If you'd be good enough to tell me first, no doubt—"

"No thank you."

"I beg your pardon."

"No."

The young man bridled visibly: this was going off the established rails. He tried to get it back again. "I understand you have an interest in gaming."

"Yes I have. I own Stacks and some others. The Squire owns the Commodore. I came here to talk about a possible mutual interest."

"Our principal . . ." the young man said; he swallowed. "I believe there's a company in which our principal has an interest—"

"A casino—I told you. A gambling-house, a chain of them. I was ready to talk but now I'm not." James Mott stood up. A final shot occurred to him and he decided to discharge it. It was really extremely rude but he didn't care. He asked again, "You say you're not a partner?"

"Need we go over that again?"

"Is your father a partner?"

"He is."

"Just so."

The young man promptly fell for it. "I really don't see the connection."

"No, but anybody else would."

James Mott went out. He'd had decidedly the best of it but it had left him ruffled. He went back to his flat, changed into country clothes, and filled the Bentley.

He started to drive to Norfolk.

Lady Elena had been telling the truth; the Squire was having a bad day. He'd had more pain than usual, which was a great deal of pain, and he was wrestling with a decision he detested. For Hagen had been telephoning and he wanted the go-ahead.

The Squire wasn't without a conscience, but it was a well-disciplined organ.

He'd heard about Gina Demuth and he hadn't known for sure that it was Hagen's toughs who had beaten her. He hadn't given such instructions and if he asked Hagen questions the man would simply deny all knowledge. But now Hagen wanted clear orders and he wanted them by eight o'clock.

The Commodore was slipping, losing money and Hagen had a plan to put it back. He hadn't put it in so many words but the Squire understood him.

He'd told Hagen he'd think it over, ring at eight.

James Mott stopped the Bentley before a portico in North Norfolk baroque. An Italian servant answered the bell and Mott asked to see his master. The servant hesitated, then gave him a chair. He waited some time till a woman came in quietly. She held out her hand. "Mr. Mott?"

"That's me." He liked her at once—she had the easy friendly manner of the woman who'd never been challenged.

She took him into a drawing room with comfortable-looking sofas and tea on a pie-crust table. She said politely, "Would you like some tea?"

"Yes please." He realised he'd had no lunch and took a third slice of cake when offered it. When he had finished she came directly to the point.

"I gather there was some bother at Foleys. They telephoned."

"They're a lot of stuck-up baskets."

It occurred to him he ought to apologise but she said, "I've been waiting for someone to call them that."

"But I thought they were your bankers."

"That's just what they are."

She was making it easy, giving him confidence. He said simply, "I own a gaming-house, Stacks, and your husband has another called the Commodore. I don't suppose you know that world, but things can easily go wrong there."

"How wrong?"

He spread his strong hands, conscious that she had noticed them. "Disturbances. Breakings-up."

She said unexpectedly, "The Commodore's losing money—I know that."

"So I'd like to be sure that it doesn't go further. I've come about that. I'm reasonable, I'm a business man."

"I'll speak to my husband," she said again. She rose firmly and he admired it, following her to the door. As he went through she stopped him. "You've been in the wars already, I see."

The stitches in his cheeks were out but the scars were raw still; he was walking like an automaton, his ribs still in strapping. He grinned. "I got into a fight," he said.

"Something to do with gambling?"

"In a way."

"It looks as though it hurt a lot."

"It hurt at the time like hell."

She said softly, "I see a lot of pain, you know." She held out her hand again. "We're sort of allies."

James Mott drove back to London. He'd done considerably more than his doctor would have approved. He was exhausted but whistling happily.

Lady Elena went back to the study and to her husband. He was sitting in his chair, bolt upright, his fingers linked. He was evidently in dreadful pain. This she could tell for she knew his least mood, but she knew nothing of his mental stress. He'd heard a car come and go, and he asked with his desperate courtesy, "Have you had a visitor?"

She was a very poor liar since she'd seldom had need to lie; she didn't try now, he was much too acute. "It was Mott, the man I told you about this morning. I fobbed him off on Foleys but they seem to have handled him stupidly."

"So he came here and you received him." It wasn't a question but a statement of astonishment.

"What else could I do? And he was talking a sort of sense, John."

"What did he say?"

She told him and he listened; he didn't answer. It would be better, she thought, if he'd blow his top, start ranting about men he didn't know or want to arriving at his house quite uninvited, talking to his wife because he didn't have the strength to see them off. She sympathised, she was hiding her thoughts too. She'd found Jimmy Mott attractive—exciting, and she could tell that her husband had guessed it. Invalids had a seventh sense.

He said at last, "I know what he was trying to say. I'll think it over."

She was dismissed and knew it; she went away. She would have liked to weep but she didn't dare.

The Squire picked up the telephone. It was barely five o'clock and he had till eight, but he didn't intend to change his mind.

In a clear taut voice he spoke to his manager. "We were talking this morning and I promised you an answer. You said you were losing customers and you wanted to get them back again."

"That's it."

The Squire hesitated on the next few words but he knew he'd have to use them. "By making Stacks too dangerous to use?"

Carl Hagen was astonished.

"Was that the idea?"
"More or less."
"But was it, man?"
"Yes."
"Go ahead," the Squire said.

CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT PELL was visiting the Commodore. He realised that he'd be recognised but that didn't worry him. The Commodore was flash, its customers flashier. There was a battery of fruit machines, something which Stacks eschewed, a crap table which might or might not just be legal, and the frenetic air of compulsive gambling. There were the orthodox two croupiers to a table and a *chef* at a pulpit desk, alert and wary. The play was evidently high.

The first man he saw was Mortimer of the Executive. Pell nodded to him amiably. He knew why Mortimer was there. A young diplomat from a friendly embassy had been losing a good deal of money. Any doubtful security risk was legitimate meat to Mortimer. He was watching without appearing to, playing very small himself.

Harold Pell put down a pound or two, moving from table to table. Then he walked quietly over to join his host, who was a topsettler in a respectable firm of bookmakers and knew the betting world. He said now, softly, "Look at them. The far table."

Pell looked. They seemed exactly the sort of people he'd have expected to find at the Commodore—elderly women in far too much jewellery who'd be playing some crazy system till dawn, the *demi-monde* gambling with their protectors' too easy money.

"Not the women, old boy."

"The men?" Pell considered them more carefully. "Flash Alecs. Self-styled society."

"Some of them. The rest are bookmakers. Odd, isn't it? A bookmaker earns his living cutting his risks and then he comes here in the evening and throws money on the table like a child. Perhaps it's a reaction. I've seen it often, they bet like fools."

"They're big men?"

"Middling. Come with me, though. And don't look too keen."

They strolled casually into the chemmy room, into an urgency which hit them. A thickset young man in a dinner

jacket was keeping an eye on the table, but Pell didn't waste time on him, watching the play instead.

The banker was sitting silently, tight-lipped and impassive. The croupier had one hand on the shoe, the other playing with the *palette*. He looked as near to excitement as a professional ever allowed himself. A stranger at Pell's side said to nobody in particular, "He's run that one seven times."

The banker sat on motionless, then suddenly he raised a hand. The croupier passed him a card and the banker faced it. He didn't speak but he rose instead, nodding at the croupier. He left the room to a sort of sigh. The croupier started on the pay-out and the stranger said unhappily, "That must have been all of twenty thou."

Pell turned to his host. "Do you want to play?"

"No thanks."

"Then let's go to my place for a drink."

Back in his *pied-à-terre*, Harold Pell mixed whisky and began to feel his way. He decided that he couldn't finesse since he hadn't the cards. He said across his whisky, "You didn't take me into that chemmy room just to watch a man lose a packet."

"You recognised the man with that bank?"

"Yes, I did."

"Then that makes it easier. He's a customer of yours?"

"I wish he were," said Pell. "We know about him but we've never nailed him. There was that business down at Fontwell Park—"

"A shocker. Razors out openly, a man nearly killed. Everybody knows it was his lot behind it."

Pell asked cautiously, "Does he still make a book?"

"He does not. He wouldn't last five minutes on any racecourse. When they're crooked in racing, they're crooked big. They take protection money from on-the-course bookmakers, and though the big ones can stand up to them, the smaller ones sometimes can't. They frighten jockeys into losing, and doping's a steady racket. Of course they have to work through the gangs."

"You think our friend this evening is in a gang?"

"Come now, Pell. You know he is and you know which one."

"Yet they let him play at the Commodore."

"Why not? He's perfectly well-behaved there and I hear he's losing money."

Harold Pell said, "I hear so, too."

"You're interested?"

"I might be."

Pell was awakened at four o'clock by a call on an ex-directory number. It was Jules Leclerc, talking openly, confident of the personal line. He said quickly, "I saw you last night at the Commodore. I saw you go into the chemmy room. Were you interested in a loser?"

"I could be. I saw a man lose a pretty big bank."

"The talk among the croupiers here is that he's dropped fifty thousand in three weeks."

"Does he have that sort of money to lose?"

"You'll know that better than I do."

"Are they taking his cheques?"

"I wouldn't know. But I can tell you this for what it's worth. Just after you'd gone this man tried to leave too. One of our young gentlemen persuaded him not to. Instead he took him to Hagen's office. He went in looking pretty white and two of the boys went in with him. You'll know what I thought and I thought quite wrong. Our friend came out smiling."

"From which you deduce—?"

"*Mon commissaire,* I don't deduce. I'm an ear, you're the thinker. But if you're tempted to make guesses I'd suggest that you make them quickly."

Harold Pell said politely, "I'm really extremely grateful."

"*Il n'y a pas de quoi.*"

Next morning Harold Pell rang through to the Executive. If it were convenient to Colonel Russell, Chief Superintendent Pell would be grateful for a word with him. Say at eleven o'clock?

Russell and Harold Pell had a language of their own, allusive and economical. It might have been incomprehensible to an outsider but they managed to communicate beautifully.

Pell laid the facts out briefly. Russell nodded, and came briskly to the point.

"You're suggesting co-operation then?"

It was a little bald, even for Pell. "I was thinking you had an interest in Mott, a sort of political interest. The Prime Minister—"

"I don't give a curse for Fletcher but I like Jimmy Mott

very much. I'll play with you. When are you expecting trouble at Stacks?"

"Pretty soon. Perhaps even tonight."

"From what you say you could well be right." Russell pressed the intercom, asking for Mortimer. He didn't need to introduce him when Mortimer came in and he talked briefly. "Any questions?"

"No thank you, sir."

"Then can you raise me three uglies beside yourself?" Charles Russell smiled.

"You mean three reliable men, sir?"

"I mean reliable men *and* uglies, the more unprepossessing the better. They're to wear really frightful dinner jackets. Can you do that for tonight?"

Mortimer nodded.

"Take your three reliable men and a radio in your pocket. Get them to put a wire on it with a plug on the end in your ear, like a hearing aid. I'll be the only sender. I'll be here myself and I'll give you instructions."

"Time of check, sir?"

"At nine o'clock. What's your job? You could call yourself a protection party."

"Very good, sir. We're to go to Stacks at nine, net in and await your orders."

Russell stared at him bleakly. He had the highest opinion of Mortimer's competence or he wouldn't have kept him five minutes. But there were times when he could have strangled him and this was certainly one of them. "No," he said patiently, "you do not go to *Stacks*."

Russell's instructions to Bob Snake had been precise. There was the probability of trouble at Stacks. It could come quite soon and might range from an all-out attempt to wreck the place—Russell thought that unlikely, at any rate to start with—down to a less violent, organised disturbance, to give Stacks a bad name and to drive away its customers. The manager was to be told of any suspicious entrants and that a Colonel Charles Russell was interested, but he was to be dissuaded from premature action, and in particular he wasn't to call the police unless an outbreak of violence forced him to. Instead, Snake was to telephone Russell at the Executive. He'd be there from a quarter to nine onwards.

It was a quarter to ten when Snake noticed them, two men he'd never seen in Stacks with a member he didn't much care

for. One of them was a very unwelcome ghost from the past. Snake slipped from the table and went quietly to the telephone. A voice answered, "Russell."

"You were right about tonight. Two of them have just come in."

"How did you spot them?"

"I knew one of them elsewhere. He's from a lot I worked with once."

"Now listen very carefully. Do absolutely nothing unless you have to. I'll ring you back in fifteen minutes. Try not to show you've recognised them. Let them look round a bit, let them get their bearings. They'll probably be wanting to or they'd have started something straight away. Do nothing provocative. Hold the fort."

"I'll try. I've told the manager and he will play with you till trouble starts. Then he'll have to call the police."

"Fair enough. Come back to that telephone in a quarter of an hour."

Russell hung up, turning to the transmitter on his desk. A red bulb was glowing steadily. He threw the switch and said blandly, "Mortimer, start a disturbance."

He smiled without malice; he was treating Mortimer abominably but had a practical reason for doing so. Mortimer was reliable, but he wasn't an actor. Brief him beforehand and anything he did would look contrived.

Charles Russell went on smoothly. "Yes, I know—I'll apologise later. Just for the moment please do as I say. Make a scene, bring your friends in too. A disturbance—a good one. Look as dangerous as you can. Good luck."

At the Commodore Club, Mortimer was furious. He'd been told he was a protection party, he'd presumed for the young diplomat he was keeping an eye on. And now his assignment turned out to be a shameful trick. He'd protest formally, later. For the moment he had an order and he intended to obey it. Oh yes, indeed. Russell could carry the can and it would serve him right.

He looked round the table at his three companions. Charles Russell had said uglies and they were authentically uncomely. Their dinner jackets didn't fit, and one had a scar across half his face, in fact an honourable war wound but it made him look villainous. In private life he was a sidesman and grew carnations. The second had no hair at all and a permanent scowl he didn't feel. The third, a normal, even handsome

man, had been more difficult. Mortimer had endowed him with an eye patch. All were trusted and proven seniors on the Executive's outside list.

Mortimer stood up suddenly. The wheel had stopped at Eleven Black, the croupier was paying out. Mortimer was on the *Impair* side and he pointed across the table. "I had twenty-five on Black," he said.

In the fortnight he'd been hanging about the Commodore, his maximum bet had been two pounds ten.

"There was no chip of twenty-five," said the croupier.

"I didn't say there was. I put down two tens and a fiver." Mortimer's grievance against Russell lent him a real indignation.

"Monsieur is surely mistaken."

"I tell you I'm not." Mortimer banged the table. "It's a swindle," he said loudly.

Somebody said wearily, "Come off it chum, let's get on with the game."

The *chef* had slid up, smooth as butter but very wary. "There is some dispute, gentlemen?"

"I'll say there is." In a way he was mildly ashamed of, Mortimer had begun to enjoy himself. "I had twenty-five on Black and I haven't been paid."

The *chef* looked at the croupier and the croupier shook his head. "If monsieur would be good enough to come with me to the office—"

"I'm not moving from here till I'm paid."

The *chef* hesitated, looking behind him. Two young men in dinner jackets had come into the room, standing silently, watching. The *chef* nodded and they moved forward.

Mortimer snapped his fingers and on either side of him a man rose. The three of them turned outwards.

The young men hesitated but came on. One of them grabbed at Mortimer and it happened very quickly. The bald man took the grabber and the man with the eye patch the other. There was a clean crisp crunch as two carefully-barbered heads met. It had been done with contemptuous competence.

The two young men fell down.

A woman screamed into the silence but it didn't last for long. There was an immediate muddled uproar.

Carl Hagen came running. He looked at Mortimer and he looked at the three men with him. He knew gorillas when he saw them. He said to the *chef*, "How much?"

"Twenty-five."

"I see," Hagen said—he saw indeed. He'd been in gambling for a lifetime and he'd seen plenty of fracas in gaming-rooms. But never one quite like this. Nobody brought gorillas in to make a fuss about seventy dollars. It didn't make sense but alas it did. Carl Hagen wasn't a stupid man. This was a warning. Start trouble at Stacks and he'd get it back.

Hagen pulled out five fivers and gave them to Mortimer. "You win," he said, "and I don't mean just the money. And now please go."

Mortimer stared at him.

"I've taken the message, I really have." The smooth sallow face was suddenly contorted. "Now beat it before I do something I'll be sorry for. You might be too. Get out of here and don't come back. Take your hoods with you."

Mortimer didn't argue—he'd done his job.

Hagen watched the four men leave then helped the *chef* to restart the game. When it was calm again he walked back to his office. He went to the telephone and asked for a Mr. Smith at Stacks.

Mortimer was talking to Charles Russell from the first call box he'd seen. He'd reported as in duty bound and now he was saying stuffily, "I must insist it was most improper, most irregular."

"I agree and I apologise. Meanwhile congratulations. The medal comes tomorrow."

Mortimer gave it up. It wasn't any use to fight. The old bastard would turn the charm on and Mortimer would capitulate. He always did.

Russell looked at the clock. It was fifteen minutes exactly since he'd telephoned to Bob Snake. He rang again: "Has anything happened yet?"

"Not yet."

"Then we're running behind our schedule a bit but I don't think it's very serious. Play it cool."

He hung up.

In the manager's room at Stacks the telephone rang again. Snake picked it up. A voice he thought he'd heard before said urgently, "Can you get Mr. Smith to speak to me?"

"We've more than one Mr. Smith, you know."

"This one isn't a member."

"Can you tell me who brought him in?"

The voice named the member Snake didn't much care for.

"Tell him it's urgent."

Snake went back into the roulette room, excited and trying to hide it. The man he'd once known was sitting with another. They didn't seem to be playing much, they had an air of waiting. Snake stood behind them.

"Mr. Smith?"

Neither turned his head.

"There's an urgent message for Mr. Smith. The caller didn't give his name."

The man Snake had known rose deliberately, frowning. "Where's the telephone then?"

"In the manager's office."

In the office Smith shut the door, picking the receiver up. "Smith," he said softly.

"Are you alone?" Carl Hagen asked.

"Of course I am."

"Then get out of Stacks. It's off."

"What the hell do you mean? You told us—"

"Never mind what we told you, it's come unstuck."

"The police—someone grassed?"

"A man brought three gorillas here. They didn't come here just to show their muscles. The first thing you pull at Stacks tonight and the Commodore's going to get the same."

"But—"

Hagen said wearily, "Three gorillas and a man brought them. You know what man? From the Security Executive."

A second's pause. "I see."

"Then do as I say. Get out and fast. On no account come to the Commodore. But you can telephone to you-know-who."

When they had gone Snake rang back to Russell. "They've left," he said, "and I'd like to know—"

"Of course you would and so you shall. Come to lunch at my club tomorrow. I'm going home. I'd meant to sleep here but now I needn't. I prefer my own bed."

It was as well for Bob Snake he did.

CARL HAGEN locked his door and poured a drink. He knew he was into a losing streak and he ought to quit. But he couldn't quit. If the Commodore went on slipping he knew the owner would simply write it off—why not? Hagen would be out of a job, and the manager of an unsuccessful gaming

club was a drug in a crowded market. He couldn't go back to America; there were three very good reasons not to. One was a lawsuit, the second the police and the third was a man with a gun.

Hagen had never met the Squire . . . But the Squire often rang him and he had freedom to do the same. He did so now and a woman's voice answered. He knew this wasn't any servant.

"Carl Hagen here. Can I speak to your husband?"

"It's going to be a bit difficult. We're just putting him to bed."

Hagen said steadily, "It's very important."

There was a silence and Hagen waited. Finally the clear voice said, "Mr. Hagen, I'll be frank with you. My husband had a rotten day. The doctor has just been and doped him."

"I see," Hagen said.

"Perhaps I could take a message or perhaps you could ring in the morning." She hesitated again. "He's usually best between eleven and luncheon."

"Tomorrow will be too late," he said.

"I'm sorry then."

"I'm sorry too. Good night."

Carl Hagen put the receiver back. He was on his own now, left with only his second string. And that raised the stakes alarmingly.

No gaming-house could operate if its clients were frightened to use it, but nor could it run if its staff was too scared to work there. And one of the croupiers at Stacks was James Mott's friend.

He used the telephone again and this time the voice was angry. "I know," it said. "One of them rang and told me. You called it all off and I'd like to know why."

"I'll tell you that later—now I've had to change the plan. This is the new one. Listen."

The voice said, "You're crazy. This is England, not where you came from."

"You owe me fifty grand! In pounds."

"If you hadn't called it off tonight I'd have owed you exactly nothing."

"Do as I say and I'll stand by the agreement."

"Don't be stupid. A bit of a beat-up, no-one seriously hurt—that was a fair enough job to wipe out fifty thousand in bits of plastic. What you're talking about now rates ten years."

"You still owe me the fifty thousand."

There was nearly a minute's thought and then, "Okay."

"And it's got to be tonight. When he leaves Stacks. The one they call Bob Snake."

Stacks Club could close at any time up to dawn, but after two o'clock or so only the hard core stayed there. The croupiers had a roster to cope with these but tonight Snake wasn't on, and he left at half past one. He lodged east of Great Portland Street, and normally he walked it, enjoying both the exercise and the strangely exciting emptiness of a great city in the small hours.

Tonight he was tired, and there was a stationary taxi in Hanover Square. The driver seemed to wake as Snake's footsteps passed him.

"Want a cab?" he asked.

"Glad to find one."

Snake gave his address and they moved away up Harewood Place, across Oxford Street and into the one-way stream through Cavendish Square. When the cab swung left into Wigmore Street, Snake reached for the sliding partition. It was stuck and he rapped on the glass.

"This isn't the way."

The driver didn't hear. He banged on the glass again. "Go right, not left. Go right."

The driver didn't turn his head.

Snake sat back and considered. The man could be drunk or more likely was simply cheating him. He'd mistaken him for an out-of-towner and he'd cruise him through Regent's Park and God knew where. Then he'd claim the full fare. Snake had suffered this once—not a second time. The taxi had turned north into Wimpole Street and sooner or later it must turn again. When it slowed on the turn, Bob Snake would simply jump.

He felt the latch of the near-side door. It seemed to have jammed. The other didn't move either.

Suddenly his scalp crawled. The driver was rolling a cigarette, steering with his right hand, rolling expertly with his left alone. It was astonishingly deft. Only once before had Snake met a man who could do that trick. He'd been part of another life and not a good one.

Bob Snake looked out of the window again. They'd turned left at New Cavendish Street. The driver flicked his lighter, still one-handed. Then he changed down unexpectedly, put

both hands on the wheel and swung right. The taxi went under an arch, into a mews, and stopped.

There was a light from a window above, just enough to show another car. Two men were standing by it.

The driver got down, moving to the off-side door. The two men moved with him, standing just behind. They had something in their hands. The light from the little window glinted on steel.

Snake shivered. He'd seen the razors out twice before.

The driver opened the door. "Come on," he said. "Come and get it." Bob Snake didn't move and the driver made his sole mistake. He reached into the cab and grabbed. Bob Snake grabbed too and beat him to it. He took the lapels of the overcoat and, still sitting, used his legs. He put his feet in the driver's stomach, bending his knees, then straightening them with all his strength. The driver, off balance, staggered back against the other men. Snake jumped from the cab and ran.

He had a chance, he thought; considering the life he led he was remarkably fit, but of course with the car they'd get him as he hadn't enough start to risk losing them down a side street. But they'd left the car facing inwards and they'd have to back out and turn it. He knew where he was—four hundred yards from Beaumont Street. Charles Russell lived in Beaumont Street. If he could give himself three hundred before the headlights swung in behind him, say forty seconds' running for a man who was running from razors . . .

It was only two hundred when the spotlight picked him out. It was the car, not the taxi, and it was accelerating fiercely. There wasn't a soul in the silent street.

A hundred and fifty yards to go. Snake looked behind quickly. Thirty yards—they were on to him. A back door of the car was opening. They'd go past him, drop one, the rest behind . . .

He ran up the steps to Charles Russell's front door, turning his back on it, feeling for the bell-push behind him. He kept his shoulder on the bell and the three men moved forward, deliberately, all three with their razors out. One step, then two and three. The nearest raised an arm and Bob Snake threw his own up. It wasn't any good, he knew—not three of them to himself unarmed.

The door opened suddenly and Snake, with his weight against it, fell. He fell against Russell, said, "Razors—"

Charles Russell gave the steps a glance, then moved

astonishingly fast. The three men had halted, uncertain. Russell neatly kicked the door shut pulling Bob Snake to his feet. "Trouble?" he asked mildly.

"Plenty of trouble. Razormen—"

"Friends of yours?"

"Ex-friends, or sort of."

"I see." Russell considered. He wore a dressing-gown but was very much awake. "You were lucky I came home tonight." He smiled unexpectedly. "We'll talk about it later, though. What will you take to drink?"

THE Prime Minister wasn't given to easy optimism but this morning, weighing it up, he had allowed himself something which was almost euphoria. He'd handsomely won a by-election which the bookies had priced at evens, and now that a general election had been decided on and dated, the public opinion polls put his party well in the lead.

It didn't seem likely that the Demuth story would break now. Who knew about it? Victor himself, but he was still in a nursing-home. His daughter, who wasn't talking. Russell, who was an official.

Jimmy Mott.

The Prime Minister frowned, the euphoria fading. He wasn't worried that Jimmy Mott would talk to a newspaper; but Mott wouldn't know just how delicate was the balance; he was a prime minister's friend but he wasn't himself in politics. That was his usefulness but also his disadvantage.

He might drop some allusion quite innocently.

The Prime Minister's frown darkened. That wasn't the whole trouble about Jimmy Mott; their relationship was becoming an embarrassment. Fletcher had never been wholly happy that a man he was known to be friendly with had an interest in the gambling world. The gaming situation was explosive. And a prime minister's friend could apparently be involved in it. A scandal...

He could deny the friendship but not with much conviction. He had, in fact, seen Mott the day before, and the interview had troubled him since; for the first time Mott had asked something. Fletcher was a suspicious man and he'd seen it as a first demand in an increasing scale of charges. There was an account between the two of them, very notably in Mott's credit. God knew where a thing like that could end.

Mott had explained that he owned a gaming-house abroad,

in a country where private gaming was still illegal. And the arrangements with the authorities were getting difficult. But if he could go there himself he felt confident he could fix it.

...The best of British luck then.

Unfortunately there was a serious snag. The gaming-house was in Belgium.

Where Mott had once had trouble before?

Yes. If he went there they might nail him. But it had been twenty years ago and perhaps a word in the right quarter...

Robert Fletcher had said yes at the time, glad to escape so lightly. It was extremely simple, a straightforward political fix of the kind he pulled daily. But now he was less sure.

His sense of well-being had flown by now and all these difficulties stemmed from Victor Demuth. There was nothing so inconvenient as old friends who were now embarrassing.

Charles Russell let Snake sleep until nine, then woke him with breakfast he'd cooked himself. He said politely, "Feeling all right?"

"I don't know how to thank you."

"Don't. Do I understand you recognised those men?"

"The taxi-man definitely. The others I'm only guessing at."

"Now listen to me carefully. This is what I'm going to do. I'm going down to the Executive now and I'll call up Mott. I don't doubt your manager's told him about that little affair in Stacks last night and I owe him an explanation. So I'll tell him what happened to you as well. With luck I ought to keep him from losing his temper, I mean, starting anything that would embarrass us. Then I'll tell the police. You're to stay here yourself—that goes without saying. I doubt if you're in much danger now but I'll detail a shadow to hang around."

Charles Russell drew breath: he was a laconic man and it had been something of a speech. "You'll find food in the fridge and there's plenty to drink. I'll rejoin you at six. Understood?"

"Understood."

An hour and a quarter later Russell was waiting at the Executive for Chief Superintendent Harold Pell. His interview with Mott had been even easier than he had hoped. Mott had listened and had thanked him. The counter-demonstration at the Commodore, the warning that two could play, had struck him as neat and effective. But the attack on

Snake was clearly much more serious. Hagen must be desperate and Jimmy Mott hadn't liked it . . . And what about the rest of the staff? Russell had reassured him that he wasn't without resources—he and a senior policeman who was next on his list of visitors. In any case the risk had decreased. A failure would make for caution since they'd have to be very stupid to suppose that the police could ignore it.

Jim Mott had thought it over, finally nodding. In that case he'd do nothing; he'd sit back and wait. The last thing he wanted was competitive skulduggery. In any event he couldn't arrange it. He hadn't the time; he was going abroad. That evening as it happened.

"A holiday?"

"Very far from it. I've a gaming-club in Brussels and there've been little local difficulties."

"I can imagine. Gambling's a state monopoly."

Mott laughed. "A lot of people think so but of course it doesn't work that way. There are concessions, but they cost money."

Charles Russell said, "But Belgium . . ." If Mott went there he'd be arrested still.

"You know about my trouble there? You know a terrible lot and I'm glad you do. But it was twenty years ago and in any case I've fixed it."

"May I ask how?"

"I've been to see a friend of mine. He said he could do it, he said he would."

"He must be remarkably influential."

"Yes, very much so."

"Good luck," Russell said, "good luck indeed."

He saw Mott out and sat down thoughtfully. So Mott had been to Fletcher and asked safe-conduct into Belgium. The Prime Minister had promised it and Mott seemed entirely satisfied.

Perhaps, perhaps not. It didn't sound Fletcher's form at all.

Jimmy Mott lived in a service flat but ate there as seldom as possible. He was fond of his food but had no taste at all for the flummery of fashionable restaurants.

Now he walked from the Executive to his favourite restaurant in Coventry Street. He left his hat and coat and went straight in.

The first person he saw was the wife of the Squire.

He hesitated, uncertain. He'd have to pass her table and

it would be rude to ignore her, but it might also be rude to stop and talk. The social niceties didn't bother him for he had the natural good manners of consideration for other people.

He'd walk past her, he decided, and if she noticed him he'd notice her. But she smiled at once, said, " Mr. Mott."

" I didn't expect to see you here."

" Why not? The steak's the best in London." In the same breath she added, " Were you lunching alone?"

" Yes."

She waved a hand at the other chair. " If you're sure you're alone . . ."

He sat down, relaxing, and ordered quickly from the waiter, steak like the Squire's wife, noticing she drank water. " I was thinking about some wine myself. May I offer you—" he said.

" That's very kind."

" Nothing special, you know. I drink the red by the carafe."

" I know nothing about wine except that I hate fuss with it."

He didn't entirely believe her but relaxed a little more. " What brings you to London?"

" Shopping. I come up once a fortnight."

" Harrods," he said, " and Fortnum and Mason's." It was a stupid thing to say, he knew, the sort of inverted snobbery he despised.

She flushed faintly but rode it. " There are plenty of other shops."

" I'm afraid I was rude."

" You were—you meant to be. That's the kind to pay no attention to. Change the subject and you're forgiven."

" Horses," he said smiling.

" An intelligent shot but a miss just the same. I ride sometimes to keep my waistline down but horse-nonsense bores me." She laughed. " You run horses, I hear."

" I've got three far from first-class chasers down at Blewbury. Also an old hack which I ride for your own reason. I like horses and the country at weekends, but I don't want to bore you."

" You shan't have the chance. Try again."

" Gambling," he said.

She was serious at once. " You're in gambling. So's my husband."

" You said that we were allies once."

" I remember I did. I meant it."

" I've a place in London called Stacks—you wouldn't know

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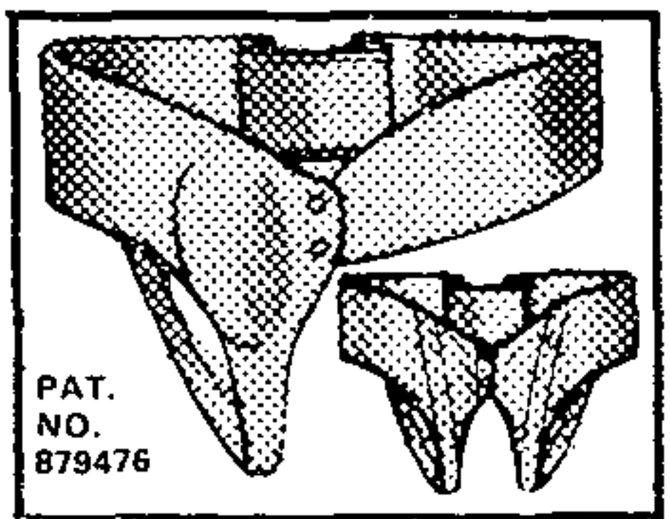

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it. It might have been broken up last night. It would have been if I hadn't had helpful friends."

"Really?" she said. "You seem to live dangerously."

He saw he'd been taking her much too fast. "It didn't happen and now I don't think it will. But talking of living dangerously, I've got a gaming-club in Brussels and there's trouble there, too."

She said quietly, "I thought it was a state monopoly in Belgium."

"You're the second person who's said that today. Are you interested still?"

"Much more than in horses."

"Then it goes something like this. All gaming's illegal in Belgium. So you start off by forming an *association sans but lucratif.*". He stumbled over the words and smiled. "Not that my accent matters. They call them A.S.B.L.s and they're sort of clubs."

"Just the same as here," she said.

"No, not a bit. Have you ever been to Ostend?"

"Not since the war."

"It hasn't changed that much. The casino's still plenty of things besides a gaming house—restaurants, a night club, even a gallery for art shows. Only the gambling's private, and the municipality gets a very high rent for the part of the building it lets for it. But it's still illegal in theory."

"And how do you come in?" she asked.

"I cash in on the odds. There's no zero on a Belgian wheel but thirty-six numbers instead of our thirty-five. They deduct a sort of tax from every winnings. It's really quite high and I offer better."

"Go on."

"So I've formed an A.S.B.L.—but we run a normal wheel with normal odds. No tax is deducted. Of course it's still illegal but so in theory are the municipal ones."

"With which you must compete," she said.

He liked the comment; she was sharp as a knife. "That's the point."

"But who controls the police?"

He looked at her respectfully. "If you should ever want a job—"

She laughed. "Who knows? But what about the police?"

"The municipalities control most of the police."

"Then why don't they shut you down? You compete. They could close you up. Why on earth don't they?"

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"You have to find the right policemen."

"And pay them?" she said casually.

"Twenty per cent it's costing me. Or was."

"They've started to squeeze you?"

"I'm going to Brussels tonight."

She accepted brandy gracefully, taking a solid swig of it. He liked that too. Her next remark he hardly heard. It might almost have been a sigh again but nevertheless he caught the words. "It can be terribly dull in Norfolk."

The waiter brought the bottle and he poured her a little more. She didn't protest, she liked brandy and wasn't ashamed of it. He said finally, "It isn't dull here. I don't quite know what was planned at Stacks last night—but whatever it was it didn't come off. But when we shut down someone went for one of my croupiers. With razors. They didn't get him, fortunately."

She said at once, "If you're thinking—"

"I'm not."

"I've lived with him for fifteen years . . . Razors! Unthinkable."

"I thought so too."

"Mr. Mott," she said, "thank you. And thank you for luncheon." She didn't make ooh-la-la when he paid the bill. She stood up and said simply, "I don't like this business and never did, but he's awfully ill and getting worse, proud as Lucifer and as stubborn. I'll try and talk to him but it's difficult."

"I understand. I can't press you."

"Good luck in Brussels. I'm glad you don't think that he—"

"Not the razor bit—never."

She smiled as she held out her hand. "You must come and stay at Vennon. I'll ring you next week."

"I'd like that very much indeed." He would, he thought—he would indeed.

Chief Superintendent Pell had listened to Russell carefully. An immediate second attack on Stacks was unlikely. But the future was still frightening.

There was no guarantee that major battle wouldn't follow. If the principals got involved themselves there'd be nothing to stop disaster. Pell asked Russell reflectively, "What about Jimmy Mott?"

"He's too sensible to start counter-action unless he's forced

to. In any case we're safe for some days. Mott's going abroad. To Belgium."

"What?" Pell was startled.

"He's going to Brussels this evening."

"They'll arrest him if he does."

"He assures me they won't. He says a friend's fixed it."

Pell said drily, "He must be a very powerful friend."

"According to Mott he's very powerful indeed."

There was a long reflective silence between the two men. Russell broke it at last. "You're thinking what I am?"

"I'm thinking I don't like politics. I mistrust politicians, if you want it more bluntly."

"Could we possibly check what's really been done?" Russell hesitated, then said it; he added dourly, "If anything really has."

Harold Pell let the plural pass. "As it happens I'm in daily touch with my opposite number in Brussels. Those men who attacked the Demuth girl went there. So I could try to fish discreetly."

"I'd be personally grateful. I feel responsible for Jimmy Mott."

Harold Pell booked a call. "Those men are lying low at the moment, but with plenty of money, amusing themselves gambling, in Mott's place as it happens." The call came through. It took more than a moment since Pell didn't try to rush it; he'd said he was going to fish and he fished with skill; he dear-colleagued and flattered, all in his excellent French.

At last he hung up in a flurry of mutual compliments. "The Belgian police have standing orders about five Englishmen."

"Yes?"

"The list has stood unchanged for several years." Harold Pell drew a breath. "It has positively not been varied in the last three days."

Charles Russell flushed. It was a childish habit and he deplored it, but when he was ashamed he blushed. With a formality he seldom allowed himself he said, "I'm really extremely grateful."

Harold Pell closed his briefcase. There was nothing to say so he didn't utter.

When he had gone, Charles Russell sat down again. He couldn't pass this and face himself. The political fix was one thing, but not the lie, the flat untruth to a friend fool enough

to trust you. Mott was tough—and old-fashioned enough to trust a friend. He was an innocent in the jungle where Fletcher hunted.

Charles Russell swore softly, then told his secretary to book him two first-class seats on the early plane next morning. He would be paying his own fare. Then he telephoned to Elizabeth van Eller in Brussels. He'd be grateful if she'd meet his plane . . . No, not exactly another job, but he'd be glad of her advice and local knowledge.

Charles Russell went back to his flat. It wasn't yet three o'clock. Snake was sleeping and Russell woke him. He explained that he was leaving for Brussels and why. Jimmy Mott had put his head in a noose and if Snake would care to go along to help him, maybe clear an account as well . . .

Bob Snake listened and nodded casually, then he went back to sleep again. For the first time in several hours Charles Russell smiled.

Elizabeth van Eller met the flight from London at the Brussels airport next morning.

Over coffee and small cakes with whipped cream, Russell made the purpose of the trip clear—a matter-of-fact dialogue which left Bob Snake startled but respectful. A person called Robert Fletcher had most cruelly deceived a friend of his, promising him a protection which he'd done nothing to implement. As a result Jimmy Mott had come trustfully to Brussels where he could still be arrested.

Russell had barely mentioned that Robert Fletcher was Prime Minister. That had been irrelevant.

Elizabeth van Eller started to question Russell. Suppose they'd already grabbed Mott at the frontier?

Charles Russell thought this unlikely. It was one thing for a minister to promise action, then do nothing, quite another actually to contact a foreign police force. It would lay him wide open and Robert Fletcher was no man's fool. No, Jimmy Mott was now in Brussels.

Then he'd have registered at a hotel. If the police had a standing list of five English names they'd pick him up.

Quite so, but where did that lead them?

Elizabeth van Eller gave her opinion. It simply wasn't Belgian form to arrest Mott solely for something done as long as twenty years ago. But suppose they had something fresher too, they could run him for that, keep the older thing as a second leg. Wouldn't Charles Russell himself . . .?

He said he would.

Very well then, there was this gaming-house. That was much more dangerous, much more live, than some swindle over scrap-iron twenty years ago.

Russell considered carefully, said at length, "What are you recommending?"

"We could trace his hotel and warn him."

"But do you think they'd let him leave?"

"It depends what he's been doing since he arrived here. I gather he doesn't waste time."

"If he tried to leave and they stopped him we'd have had it. He'd be committed and so would the police."

Elizabeth said, "It's probably woman's nonsense but I've a hunch. What policeman doesn't love to catch you in the act? I think they'll go to this place of Mott's, preferably when Mott's in it."

"It's a logical hunch—I like it. All roads lead to Mott's place anyway. I suggest we dine and go on there. All three of us."

The thinking of the Belgian Chief of Police had been a little less compressed than was Elizabeth van Eller's. James Mott was now respectably rich, had friends in British politics, and one of his ex-associates was now mayor of a town in the North, a Fleming of Flemings and a leader in the Irredentist movement. So arresting James Mott for some ancient crime was more than a policeman's job was worth. But there was the matter of the gaming-house. The Chief objected to corruption in his police force.

It was only chance that he'd even discovered the fact. The municipality had been wondering whether to start an *association sans but lucratif*, but had stopped the preliminaries on discovering that a gaming-house was already functioning in the most fashionable part of Brussels. The Chief of Police had lost much face, which he hadn't liked. Of course, after that, it had been a matter of days to find out who'd been corrupted; discreet inquiries into the bank accounts of the wives and daughters of the local police had narrowed it down to just two men.

Challenged, one of them had broken. He'd had twenty per cent but been asking for thirty. The local manager had refused it, but his master was coming to Brussels himself and an appointment had been arranged for them in a café downtown.

It was the Chief's intention that the appointment be kept, though not only by the broken Inspector Albert.

The Chief was talking now to his most trusted man. "Albert will be carrying the recorder. Concealed, of course. But you're to sit within earshot and you're to listen very carefully. Corroboration if possible. But you're not to intervene till the moment comes."

"You mean when the money passes, sir?"

"I mean when the money passes."

"And then?"

"You arrest them both."

Mott was never quite sure what had held him back. He had gone to the café and at once felt uneasy. Albert's terms had been the expected ones, a demand for a further ten per cent, a final settlement for five. The method of payment had been reasonable, fifteen thousand francs advance instead of the previous ten, the rest to be accountable with Mott's manager every month. They'd reached agreement, Albert had asked for the lump sum down, and Mott had nodded.

But somehow he didn't bring out the money. There was a man at a neighbouring table sipping Byrrh, but Mott couldn't have sworn that he was suspicious. He looked round the café. It was filling with minor business men, quietly prosperous, reassuring. Jimmy Mott wasn't reassured at all. Once in the war there'd been a sniper behind a little wall. Mott hadn't consciously thought of it but he'd thrown himself flat and the bullet had gone over him. He'd felt danger then and he felt it now.

He rose and looked at Albert once. "Come up to my place at ten tonight."

He walked away.

Conferences at police headquarters were always solemn, and the hastily-called one that afternoon had been even stodgier than usual. A minister had been there too; the Chief of Police knew he needed cover in what was now an extremely delicate matter.

The minister had flapped, of course. Not to put a gloss on it, the local police had been taking bribes. Did the Chief believe he could smother that scandal?

He replied stiffly that he could break these men departmentally; he could, that is, if he were instructed not to prosecute. Meanwhile he was more interested in trapping the

corrupter than the corrupted. He'd tried to do it that morning but alas it hadn't come off.

What did the Chief propose now? To raid the gaming-club? Perhaps the Chief might make a suggestion? They would all be grateful, the minister said.

The Chief winced. He had been in contact with a colleague of his in London. Two English criminals were hiding in Brussels.

And how did that help with the gaming-club?

Simply that the two hoodlums spent every evening there. The Chief began to explain further. "Naturally we've been keeping these criminals under surveillance. So two of my men follow them tonight to a certain house. To their total astonishment they discover it's a gaming-house. Naturally they summon me. My men arrest the two English thugs—we haven't the option not to now—and I arrest James Mott myself. It won't look like a formal raid for the very good reason it won't be."

The minister realised the Chief had lumbered him. The Chief would arrest James Mott, then ask for orders. Two different sets were possible and both had political overtones. You could prosecute Mott, who had friends in British politics and an ex-associate a city's mayor in the dangerous North. With him two policemen who'd taken bribes. There'd be a scandal if you chose that course—the newspapers would be black with it. Or you could put pressure on Mott, then let him go; you could persuade him to cut his losses and slip away. The municipality would be pacified—it might even take over the place from Mott. You needn't expose your bent police in court since they wouldn't be wanted as witnesses. But you'd have to arrest James Mott to earn the choice.

"Minister," the Chief was asking, "I've your authority to arrest James Mott?"

"I suppose so." It came reluctantly.

Nobody else spoke and the meeting broke up. The Chief poured a drink—he considered he'd earned it. The plan wasn't bad at all.

It wasn't the Chief of Police's fault that it miscarried in near disaster.

RUSSELL entered Mott's gaming-club by the simple expedient of producing a card and announcing himself. If a Mr. James Mott were present he'd be grateful for a word with

him. He was taken to an office, leaving Snake and Elizabeth playing minimums on the wheel. Mott was at a desk and rose; he looked at Charles Russell once—it was enough. "Trouble," he said, "or you wouldn't be here."

Russell approved the absence of fuss; he said as laconically, "More trouble than you know."

"May I take it you've come to tell me?"

"You may indeed." Russell considered briefly, arranging his thoughts. "You told me you could be arrested here for some ageing offence. And you told me you'd been to a friend to fix it. But I was curious—it's a habit—and I made a few inquiries."

He drew a deliberate breath, then dropped his news coolly. "You've been fixed all right, but not in the way he promised you. He didn't do a thing, but he let you come. You're quite in the open here, quite without protection."

There was a formidable silence and Charles Russell watched James Mott. His heavy square face had flushed but he didn't swear. Russell could guess his thoughts and they wouldn't be calm . . . After all these years to be betrayed almost casually. The manner was as abrasive as the deed. He said at last slowly, "So you came here to warn me. I don't know how to thank you—"

"Don't."

"But the risk to yourself—he's Prime Minister and powerful."

Russell said something brisk and to the point about Robert Fletcher.

There was another long silence. "Why do you think he did it?"

Charles Russell shrugged. "I can't read a politician's mind but I've had plenty of practice with vicious men. One thing's for certain. He's in the middle of an election and you know very much more than he likes." Russell leaned forward. "You know about Victor Demuth, the whole damned story."

James Mott said, "I hadn't thought of that." It was true, he thought. He hadn't and clearly he should have; he'd taken friendship for granted in a world where there were no friends. It was a mistake and he'd nearly paid for it. He asked quietly. "What happens now?"

"It might depend how you've spent your day here."

Jimmy Mott told him and Russell whistled. "Let's get this straight. You went with money to your Inspector friend but cried off at the very last moment on a pricking of the thumbs?"

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"That's what happened."

"But you told him to come up here at ten?"

Jimmy Mott nodded.

Russell looked at his watch. "At ten, you said? It's five to now. I think we'd better go out and wait."

Jimmy Mott rose first and opened the door. As Russell went past him he said softly with naked hatred: "Robert Fletcher was a friend of mine. Or I thought he was. If I ever get out of Belgium without a sentence..."

They went back into the gaming rooms. There was much the same atmosphere as Charles Russell had noticed at Stacks but the decoration was more lavish. Bob Snake and Elizabeth had moved over to the chemmy. The room wasn't *en suite* but had a separate door from the half-moon hall. Snake had started a game and Elizabeth was watching. Four men were playing and Mott, at Russell's side, stopped dead. He was whiter than ever but not from fear. He began to move forward but Russell caught his sleeve. "Steady," he said. "Wait for it."

Mott didn't answer, breathing hard. Charles Russell fully sympathised but this wasn't quite the moment for violence. It would play into the policemen's hands. And two of the men *were* policemen.

James Mott was cooling slowly but his quiet voice was furious.

"Two of those men are the ones who beat up Gina." He put his hand to his cheek instinctively. "They also had fun and games with me."

"I know, Pell showed me photographs. I wouldn't blame you for a rough house but I beg you not to start one. The other two men are policemen."

Mott threw a glance at them. "How do you know?"

"I can't prove it but I'll bet with you."

"Fair enough—you're the expert." Mott managed a smile. "And what happens now?"

"I've a hunch we're not all on stage yet."

"You were right," a voice said, "but now we are." It was an educated voice, speaking excellent English and its owner was smiling amiably. He looked quickly round the room and he bowed to Russell. "Colonel Charles Russell—*enchanté*. We met in Washington three years ago. I wasn't a Chief of Police at the time—now I am and I'm here on business. I hadn't expected to see you here. May I ask what you're—?"

"I've come here privately."

"But you're still Colonel Russell." The Chief looked round the room again. "That croupier, for instance, isn't one of the house's regulars."

"No, he's a sort of nephew of mine. I brought him with me from London."

"Indeed?" The Chief was polite but as cold as steel. "And the lady?"

"Madame van Eller. She worked for me once but now does not. She's married to a Belgian and her husband's in excellent standing."

"I see." But the Chief didn't quite. He said formally, playing for time, "Then permit me to complete the introductions. Of the four men at the table two are police. The others are English criminals whom your Chief Superintendent Pell has been asking me to arrest. Tonight I propose to."

"I'd be happy to see it done."

"I'm glad." The Chief considered. He hadn't thought it probable that the Head of the Executive would be interested in a pair of hoods. James Mott, on the other hand, had political connections, in the jungle world which was very much Russell's stamping ground. The Chief began to feel his way. He was a Chief of Police on his native patch and Charles Russell was a foreigner. "So we'll arrest these two now and get it over."

He'd been half hoping that Russell would pass it but only half.

Instead Russell said, "You're the Chief of Police. You came here on a routine arrest?"

The Chief allowed an expressive shrug. So the buttons were off the foils.

"No," he said briefly, "I didn't do that." He nodded towards James Mott. "I came for him."

Charles Russell said, "A pity."

"Why?"

"I could make out a very fair case but not in public. If there is somewhere we could have a word..."

The Chief of Police frowned. He had a vast respect for the Security Executive but there were limits to its authority... Muscling in on him without warning, suggesting blandly that they discuss his duty. There was nothing to discuss.

The Chief snapped suddenly, turning his back on the silent room. He walked to the door and locked it, put the key in his pocket, and faced back towards the still-silent room. He

looked at Charles Russell coldly. "*Et alors*?" he said. "And now?"

Russell didn't answer. Instead the two Englishmen who had been listening, exchanged a glance. The shorter of them nodded and they rose simultaneously. They'd been sitting between the policemen and each turned outwards. They had pistols out but they used the butts, striking with rattlesnake speed and hard. The police had half risen but off-balance were defenceless. They fell across their chairs and brought them down.

There was a split second of indecision, then Mott threw the heavy card shoe. He'd picked the short man and he'd got him and he followed up the throw with a bull's quick rush. The tall man had turned his gun round, pointing it but stepping back. He stumbled against a fallen chair, moving his hand instinctively as his balance went. Bob Snake promptly jumped him.

Charles Russell watched regretfully, conscious that at sixty his intervention would be a nuisance. The short man was staggering, his gun on the carpet. The mahogany shoe had caught his head, robbing him of half his steam as once his own cosh had half-stunned Mott. Mott kicked his gun under the table. He picked up a chair, snapped a leg off like a match. He had very strong hands still. He began to use it happily, taking his time.

Bob Snake and the tall man were fighting on the floor. Snake was fast but he wasn't heavy, and though he'd caught his man off-balance he lacked the weight for á quick decision. They were fighting for the gun, the chance to use it, rolling like porpoises.

Russell began to move but moved too late. Snake was suddenly still and the tall man was up.

He had the gun and was aiming it, not at Russell but at the Chief.

"Unlock that door and get out of the way."

The Chief didn't move and Russell's opinion of him rose sharply.

The tall man took three steps forward with the gun.

"Open up or I'll shoot."

Charles Russell saw he meant it: so did the Chief. He turned away from the gun with his hand in his pocket. It came out with the key.

There was the strangled cough of a thirty-eight calibre with a silencer. The tall man dropped his gun and the Chief put

his foot on it. The tall man was swearing, wringing his gun-hand. Elizabeth van Eller gave the thirty-eight to Russell. He reversed it and began to move. He was sixty, he was thinking, but he hadn't forgotten quite all of it. He feinted at the tall man, swinging the pistol from right to left. The tall man put both his hands up, then, at the miss, grabbed forwards. Russell's shoe blocked his moving foot and the tall man tripped. Charles Russell, backhanded, knocked him cold with the butt.

He stepped back deliberately, returning the pistol to Elizabeth van Eller. He hadn't known she'd brought it but this was scarcely the moment to chide her. Russell looked round the room again: It was still good theatre but the genre had changed. Five men were on the floor but Snake was stirring. It had been a good commercial play before, now it was Shakespearian. Except that the five men weren't dead. There'd been a second change too and to Russell it was a welcome one. James Mott was standing and so was he. There was also a woman and the woman had the gun. The Chief wasn't the central figure now, it was Russell and he accepted it.

He said to the Chief: "*Et alors*? And now?"

Things didn't look so good to the Chief of Police. He'd sent up two subordinates to effect a routine arrest and the subordinates in question were now unconscious on the carpet. Of the men to be arrested one had been clubbed by Jimmy Mott, but since he'd come to arrest James Mott himself that was hardly satisfactory. The other had pulled a gun on him, and though he hadn't obeyed him indecently fast he'd moved in the end at gun point. That was even less impressive. He'd been saved by a woman with a pistol. She'd been trained by the Executive; Charles Russell had acknowledged her. The Security Executive. It was out of its jurisdiction and butting in: the fact remained that it had saved him from looking a fool and worse. Colonel Charles Russell of the Security Executive . . .

Who was now standing quietly, watching him.

The Chief of Police sighed. He'd be finished and he knew it. So would Charles Russell know it. Russell held him by the shortest hairs.

But Russell was speaking now matter-of-factly: "Shall we treat?" he was saying pleasantly.

The Chief of Police hesitated but not for long. He hated

explanations too and Charles Russell seemed ready to skip them. If this was the English manner, the cool allusion and the throwaway, then he wasn't to be outdone in it. He asked quietly, "What are you selling?"

Russell said: "Silence."

'"Can you guarantee it?"

"Yes." Russell looked round the room again. "Your own two men are unconscious still and they didn't see, well, the worst of it. The croupier is my first cousin once removed. I know him extremely well and he'll do as I say. Madame van Eller worked for me once—I can guarantee her unreservedly."

For the first time she spoke; she said, "Thank you very much, sir."

"And the two English extortioners?"

"I don't see too much difficulty. When your own two men come round they can arrest them as intended. Then you send them over to England on extradition. I don't think they'll make a legal fuss. Not now. Waving pistols at a Chief of Police —what could you give them for that?"

"Ten years, I'd guess—very possibly more."

"We'd probably give them a little less. For grievous bodily harm, I mean—to a girl called Demuth and to Mr. Mott himself. I doubt if they'll risk a second dose here by talking out of turn. Send them over and we'll look after them. By the time they come out of prison we'll both of us have retired."

The Chief of Police said, "And Mr. Mott?"

"I'm selling silence. You're paying for it with Mr. Mott."

"That's precisely as I'd imagined it." The Chief of Police was exceedingly dry. "I'm to let Mott go and this evening is expunged. From the record and from your memory."

"That puts it very succinctly."

"But I see little local difficulties."

"Of presentation, you mean? The tiny touches which add conviction?"

"Yes, but they're not insuperable." The Chief of Police considered, then began to recite impersonally. "I came in on a scene of violence, two armed English criminals fighting with my agents. In the struggle which followed Mr. James Mott bolted. Then I overpowered the Englishmen, lightly wounding one in the process." He held out his hand. "Madame van Eller will please present to me her pistol. There's a bullet somewhere in this room and it's got to have come from my weapon. The Englishmen I leave to you—you suggested it

and it's practical." He inspected the tall man's hand. "It's a flesh wound. We'll dress it and fly them to England at once. We shouldn't wish to charge them here on a trifling technicality. I mean resisting my agents, since the rest didn't happen."

The Chief of Police had risen now, bowing at Elizabeth. "A beautiful piece of shooting; it would have been awkward if you'd winged him hard. As for what you've seen tonight I've the Colonel's word you worked for him. I've his word for the croupier and I take it too for Mr. Mott."

Charles Russell said, "There's one thing you've overlooked, perhaps."

"The chase after Mr. Mott? I'd thought of that. When I find that he's bolted I must naturally go after him. He'd be making for the frontier and the nearest is due south through Mons. Say seventy kilometers. He's carrying his passport? Good. So I've a car outside and I'll chase him down the obvious road. Except that he'll have gone south-west for Lille instead. There won't have been time to block every frontier."

The Chief turned to Mott. "May I ask if you brought a car here?"

"No."

"A pity but not disastrous. I'm afraid you'll have to steal one." The Chief produced a bunch of keys. "These fit most French makes of the last three years and several of the German. I'd choose a French one myself—the locks are very poor indeed." He walked to the window, drawing the heavy curtain. "I thought so—there's a fire escape." He stood aside politely and Elizabeth went first. Russell came last and the Chief of Police stopped him. "I'll have to bring round those men of mine before I follow you—they've an arrest to make."

For an instant he hesitated again, then held out his hand. "Thank you," he said simply. "I'm much obliged."

"For nothing at all," Charles Russell said.

He spoke with complete sincerity. He could recognise a good policeman when he saw one.

As they went down the iron stairs quietly Jimmy Mott said to Russell, "I'll dump the car in Lille and catch a train. There's no point in risking driving through to a Channel port. I shouldn't make the deadline anyway."

"You've a deadline?"

"Yes, *The Freeman*'s."

Charles Russell didn't reply at once. The Squire owned *The Freeman* and the Squire hated Fletcher. So, by now, did James Mott. An eye for an eye, the ancient law. Robert Fletcher was now committed to a general election and James Mott had Victor Demuth's story. "If I ever get out of Belgium without a sentence..."

Russell said finally, "You'll make the deadline for the day after. Comfortably. You'll go and see the editor?"

"I've got time as you say—I'll go straight up to Norfolk."

"The Squire's pretty ill."

"I've got a string through his wife."

"Have you indeed?" Charles Russell was surprised but didn't comment.

"And business to discuss as well."

"What sort of business?"

"Gambling. I don't want a war and I've got something to sell." Mott looked at Russell sideways. "You've taught me a great deal tonight."

RUSSELL was reading *The Freeman* with his morning tea. A one-inch headline defaced the front-page eight columns. *The Freeman* was a working newspaper, not Printing House Square. So it hadn't attacked the party but the man and suddenly a dull election had exploded into life. *The Freeman* had the story of Victor Demuth and it was printing it straight, inviting denial. It could afford to do so.

Russell turned from the news to the comment, impressed. The comment was a wicked job. A Member of Parliament, a back-bencher in the Government, had gone behind the Curtain intending to defect there. For some reason they'd sent him back again and Fletcher had smothered the story. Why? The question wasn't answered since the reader would answer it better. And this was the man who was asking you to trust him, the man who said he was above party politics and the only one fit for power...Power. But power affected everyone, their pay packets, the shopping bag, what they watched on the telly, their daily life. Was this the man...?

Charles Russell dressed and took a taxi to Eighty Welbeck Street. He neither liked Demuth nor had reason to spare him, but Gina was Victor's daughter and Bob Snake, his favourite nephew, her fiancé.

A word with a doctor confirmed Victor's condition; he

wasn't certifiable but he was wholly unfit for regular work and under any sort of pressure he'd almost certainly collapse again. It was fortunate he had money.

Charles Russell thanked the doctor and went upstairs to present the alternatives to Victor: he could be the central dish in a political dog's dinner; there'd be reporters after him day and night, very probably the police as well. Hadn't there been some misunderstanding about taking out too much currency? The other alternative was to go abroad.

...Go abroad?

Why not? The sensible thing was to slip away, write the book he'd never had time for. He was interested in painting so Russell suggested Florence. There were English people living there too.

There were indeed—a really horrible community. Demuth would be very happy there.

But would they allow him to leave?

Perhaps not if he simply tried to run, but Russell had certain resources and he'd feel justified in using them. He had only to agree and he'd be out of the country that evening. The Executive would look after the arrangements. Of course there was a very small price.

Victor Demuth inquired it.

It was a trifle really, a matter of withdrawing an objection. Victor's daughter was a minor and Russell's nephew wished to marry her. He thought well of the boy though admittedly he'd sown his oats. He liked Gina too, who'd taken a beating for her father. So there was a moral case, too, though Russell wasn't the man to flog it... Then it was understood? Excellent. A car would be round in the late afternoon and Demuth could trust the man he'd send. He'd bring a document too and Demuth could sign it.

Agreed? Then it was done.

Russell took a second taxi to his office and the Executive. He telephoned Jimmy Mott, making an appointment at three o'clock, then he sent for Mortimer and gave him orders about Demuth. The mid-day papers had come in by now and Charles Russell read them carefully. The Prime Minister had intended to speak in Birmingham, what the papers absurdly called a keynote speech.

He had cancelled the meeting, caught an airplane back to London.

Russell went to his club for lunch but not at once to the

dining room. He went first to the crowded bar and listened. There was a single subject of talk but two opinions. The minority said the story would lose the election for Fletcher's party; the majority—Russell agreed with it—thought it wouldn't quite do that.

But it would finish Robert Fletcher; the only interest was just how.

In the corner by the window someone was making a book. He was offering odds on Fletcher's health and the arithmetic wasn't generous.

It was long odds-on that in a month he'd be out of politics, sick, and it was seven to five that the first sickness would come today.

Charles Russell went up to the dining room, glancing at the ticker as he went by. There was a Cabinet meeting at two o'clock.

James Mott arrived at three and sat down. He was looking remarkably well and Russell said so. "The Norfolk air seems to suit you."

"Yes, and what happens there."

"You're an unchristian, revengeful man."

"I know."

"I ought to reprove you."

"I know—but you won't. Besides, I did some business too. You'll approve of the business, or at least the Chief Super will."

"Chief Superintendent Pell? What was the nature of the business?"

"I gave the Squire a story or more accurately I sold him one. We're going into partnership—Stacks and the Commodore. We're going to pool resources, the smart crowd for the Commodore, the solid lot for Stacks. Just as it always was, less the competition. The Squire's sacked Carl Hagen. The Commodore's getting my manager and I'll put in Bob Snake at Stacks to take his place."

Mott grinned. "He'll be able to marry at once if Demuth will let him."

"He'll let him all right. I saw him this morning."

"He agreed to the marriage? You stuck him up?"

Russell said urbanely, "I've made some trifling arrangements for Demuth's private benefit. Naturally he co-operated."

"I said once before you'd taught me plenty."

"And your place in Brussels?"

"I've written it off. Going in with the Squire I can soon get the money back."

There was a comfortable silence which Russell broke. "But returning to Norfolk ..."

"Ah yes. So the Commodore hasn't a motive to smash Stacks. No more war, no skulduggery. Pell should be pleased."

"Harold Pell will be pleased." Charles Russell was thinking it was a considerable understatement. He'd been talking to Pell the day before. Two specialists in extortion had been flown back to England from Brussels and Pell had a cast-iron case worth perhaps ten years. He'd picked up sundry razor-men too but he was playing that one slowly. He wanted to smash the gang complete, not just the three who'd gone for Snake. Finally Carl Hagen had disappeared, but Pell hadn't a case against him sure to stick. Provided he left the country Pell didn't care.

And now there would be no casino war. Stacks and the Commodore were by far the biggest, and though the smaller ones might make trouble still it wasn't the small fry which kept Harold Pell awake at night. There was much danger still in the gaming world but one crisis at least was over.

Another cosy silence fell, interrupted now by Mortimer with a late evening edition which he put on Russell's desk. The Cabinet had met but had broken up—the Prime Minister had been taken ill. It seemed very improbable that he could keep his public engagements for what remained of the election. Russell passed the paper to Mott who read it quickly. His face was almost expressionless. He said at last, "It'll do. It's the English way."

"And what'll you do now yourself?"

"Go back to Vennon."

"Vennon? Where's that?"

"Vennon Hall is where the Squire lives. I'm going for a long weekend."

"The Squire asked you to stay at Vennon?"

"No, Lady Elena."

Something in Mott's tone made Russell look up. Mott wasn't expressionless now—not even trying. Russell said softly, "You'll have to watch it, you really will."

"She's an awfully nice woman."

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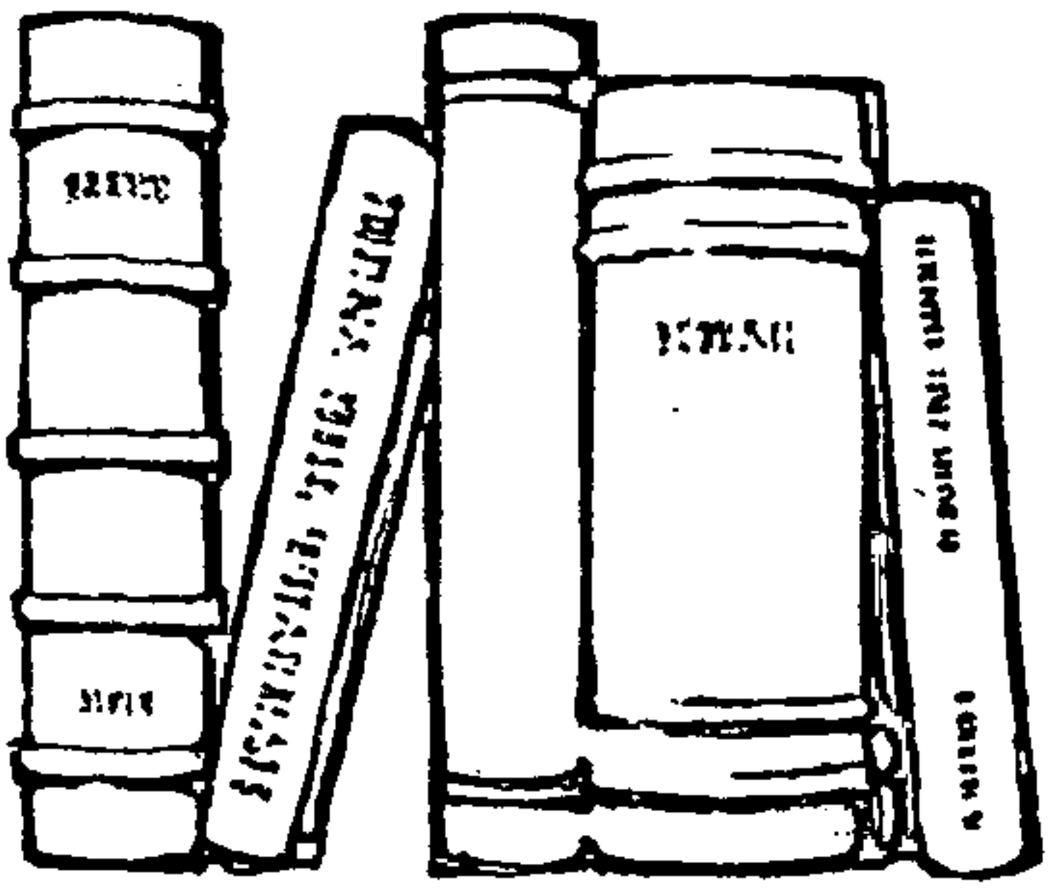
This Argosy serial was condensed from the novel "The Power House," which Cassell are to publish in September.



Women — but why only as the men see them?

ONE of the anomalies of English literature is that the specifically feminine sensibility has not been adequately expressed.

Jane Austen, in superb prose, succeeded in portraying women as social creatures; but she had no other aspirations. George Eliot, especially in *Middlemarch*, approached this uncharted territory, but then withdrew. Virginia Woolf's perspective was too individual to shed light upon it, and in spite of the plethora of women novelists who now get into print, this area is still untouched.

But also in these modern novels, even after the sex-liberation process of the last ten years, we fail to perceive any trace of the writer's specific feminine sensibility. The authoresses write about women only as men see them. Is this sufficient? Perhaps it is. I may be wrong, but I suspect that a woman's experience is drastically different from a man's, and has not yet been expressed in literature. The alternative conclusion is that the woman's world is merely a reflection of the man's and that women have nothing that is peculiarly their own. I prefer to believe otherwise.

For this reason I am disappointed in Edith de Born's *The Price of Three Cézannes* (Chapman & Hall, 21s.). She has a heroine who is complicated, almost neurotic, something of a nymphomaniac, a disappointed painter, in love with her father. Yet with these intimate and interesting complications to unfold for us, Miss de Born perversely chooses to have a man to tell the story and describe his reactions to amorous encounters with her. One wonders why this opportunity has been bilked and why, too, so many women novelists fail to give the essential feminine point of view. However, it is fair to say that, within

BOOK REVIEWS by RONALD DUNCAN

these limits, *The Price of Three Cézannes* is most competently written and would absorb you on a journey between Manchester and Crewe; that is, if the author's ruse of introducing a French character who speaks the most appalling pidgin English throughout does not cause you to close the book in irritation. Surely this joke should not have been exploited for more than half a page?

The mistake of choosing a masculine narrator also causes Miss de Born to write very inadequately when she is describing what drives her hero to visit a prostitute in Marseilles. This limitation is all the more remarkable since she wishes to write about a woman who is a "freelance lover."

Another omission is the author's failure to describe the suffering—which she recognises—of the woman over fifty who asks what she should do "*when the urge to touch is still strong and you yourself have become untouchable.*" Surely this whole unhappy world of the tortured sensibility within the unattractive woman, or the woman who is no longer young, deserves reporting with more than a gesture? Edith de Born is content to write prose-*vérité*. This is a fair example:

"'*Do have some wine, Mr. Harding, please, and try the pâté, it's home-made. I warned you—this is only a little fork dinner.*'

'*Everything's delicious, Madame.*'

'*Is she reasonable?*'

'*Who?*'

'*This dressmaker.*'

'*Mélanie says she's incredibly cheap.*'

'*Nobody is nowadays.*'

'*Are you comfortable, my love?*'"

This kind of Grundig-perception may be hideously accurate,

and depict the *non sequitur* nonsense that we all hear and also speak. But naturalism is not enough. If it were, Dictaphones could write novels. They are certainly contributing to them.

UNPUNCTUATED PATTERN

My sympathy is with anything nowadays that enables new authors to penetrate the economic censorship which prevents a writer getting work published unless he can achieve an immediate large sale. Messrs. Hutchinson's New Authors series is in this category. And, of course, one should be tolerant towards a first novel. But *Pattern of Chalk* by Dennis Miles (25s.), strains that tolerance. It is a simple story of detection, set in a school and overhung with the corridors of the Remove and other suggestions from C. P. Snow. Messrs. Hutchinson's original intention was, I believe, to discover new writers of potential interest. I do not think this book—of 60,000 words of prose punctuated by few original thoughts—achieves it.

There is nothing more irritating than the new writer who puts novelty at a premium and tries to impress you with outlandish imagery, or who seeks to shock in some superficial way. Mr. Miles, however, goes to the other extreme. He is the prototype of bromide, and moves smoothly from one cliché to another platitude, and no individual observation disturbs the even tenor of his drip. The first paragraph is typical:

"'*I've been delegated to take you on a conducted tour,' the older man said. 'Not that I'm particularly qualified to do so. I just happen to have a free period.'*"

It is conspicuous by its clichés: "...delegated...on a conducted tour...particularly qualified...happen to have a free period..." and so it goes on until the last page of non-thought.

NOT FOR CHILDREN?

Obviously my own literary awareness is considerably limited, for I had read a substantial part of Wilbur Smith's *The Sound of Thunder* (Heinemann, 30s.), which, the dust-cover informs the reader, is a successor to *When the Lion Feeds*, before I realised that I was not reading a book written specifically for children. Up to that point I had quite enjoyed it. But when I noticed the publisher's blurb which claimed other ambitions than to amuse the kiddies, I became more than disconcerted. There is, of course, a great novel to be written on the South African war, but it would seem that we will have to wait for the next war on that Continent before it is written.

Why does the book fail? I suppose the answer is simply that the author is writing *about* something but not experiencing it. It lacks the flavour of authenticity which being embroiled in the subject would have given it.

A "PROGRIS RIPORT"

"*Im skared. Lots of pepul who werk at the collidge and the pepul at the medicil school came to wish me luk. Burt the tester brot me some flowers he said they were from the pepul at the psych departmint. He wished me luk. I hope I have luk. I got my rabits foot and my luky penny and my horshoe.*"

The first part of *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes (Cassell, 25s.), is written entirely in this style. The justification for this is that it consists of a "progris riport" of Charlie, an amiable moron with no prospect of ever being anything else. At the age of thirty-two, however, he undergoes an operation at a psychiatric hospital and is turned from a moron into a genius with an I.Q. of over 185. After the operation, Charlie examines the scientific data which had been applied to himself, finds that the treatment is only temporary, and foresees that he will revert to a moron again. This theme comes within the orbit of science fiction.

Charlie soon learns how to spell, and by the middle of the book his most absorbing interests are "etymologies of ancient languages, the newer works on calculus of variations, and Hindu history." But unhappily this is only an aside, and Daniel Keyes allows convention to subdue his interests in this direction by making Charlie go through all the usual hoops. Once he has achieved literacy, the moron discovers he is still emotionally undeveloped, consequently the book is padded out with Charlie's attempts to get to bed with the right woman. But even here there is a note of originality since Charlie, unlike most of the contemporary fictional heroes, is not sexually competent, but inhibited to the point of impotence.

Nevertheless, in spite of this touch of realism, the author falls into line by assuming that sexual experience is the apex of maturity and the beginning of individual consciousness. This is, of course, one of our contemporary myths and modern phallacies (or fallacies, whichever spelling you prefer). Of course, the reason (how did you guess?) for Charlie's impotence is some childhood trauma with his wretched mother. It really is hilarious that the human mind, having spent so much time trying to remove from itself the burden of original sin, should now lumber itself with the bulk of this Freudian dilemma.

Somebody should do some research into the question of how we have merely transferred Old Testament mythology into psychological jargon.

A de Maupassant or a Boccaccio could have made these sexual bouts that misfire into comic interludes, but Mr. Keyes lacks a European sense of humour, and with American realism, depicts the scenes without a sardonic or ironic touch.

But lying behind *Flowers for Algernon* is a theme with a universal application. All of us start as morons, for no child can speak at birth, and all of us suffer the same decline in old age that afflicts Charlie after his operation—therefore his dilemma has overtones.

Unfortunately, this implication is not exploited by Daniel Keyes, who is content to treat his theme on a clinical level. He fails to make Charlie into a person, though the character is constantly protesting that he is that and not merely an object for a scientific experiment. In spite of his interesting background, experience and denouement, as a character Charlie remains merely an idea and never becomes a person.

This is a blight which affects many contemporary novelists. The characters they create are merely ideas in their heads, and there they are made to go through the sexual hoops and get drunk and have what passes for experience, but never emerge as anything more than notions. It is very hard to put one's finger on the reason for this failure. Is it that a character only becomes alive, not by its consistency, but by its inconsistency?

MR. DALI'S DIARY

It was a great relief to my spleen to be sent Dali's *Diary of a Genius* (Hutchinson, 35s.). It is a most infuriating book. That is its intention. The title is meant to annoy you, but I am convinced that it is correct. Dali's first title for it was *My Re-secret Life*, and it was intended as a sequel to *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali by Salvador Dali.*

In his prologue, he aptly quotes Michel de Montaigne: "*There is a greater difference between one man and another than between two animals of different species.*" And in the first few entries, written in 1952, Dali reveals his early concern with Nietzsche and the will to power. What Dali has realised is that, in contemporary terms, the Nietzschean concept of power is the will to publicity. This is very shrewd of him. Many of us regret this contemporary fact, but one should not condemn Dali for fighting the world with the weapons it forges.

The more timid readers will be shocked by some of Dali's

confessions which are placed on the first few pages with the specific aim of weeding them out. The book is bespattered with dicta which are intended to affront and clearly the author hopes to insult you wherever he can:

"The worst painter in the world, from every point of view, without the foggiest hesitation or any possible doubt, is named Turner."

In the second appendix there is a comparative table of Dali's valuation of different painters' attributes. In this we observe that Leonardo gets almost full marks, that Ingres is seven places ahead of Vermeer, that Dali places himself three points ahead of Picasso in technique, two points behind in inspiration, one point behind in genius, but twelve points ahead in authenticity. It is, of course, a very sad disappointment that the book contains so many photographs and so few drawings.

In spite of its infantilism and the need to collar the spotlight at any cost, I recommend this book most highly because it has, on every page, an appetite for life and an enjoyment of living which is as rare as it is precious.

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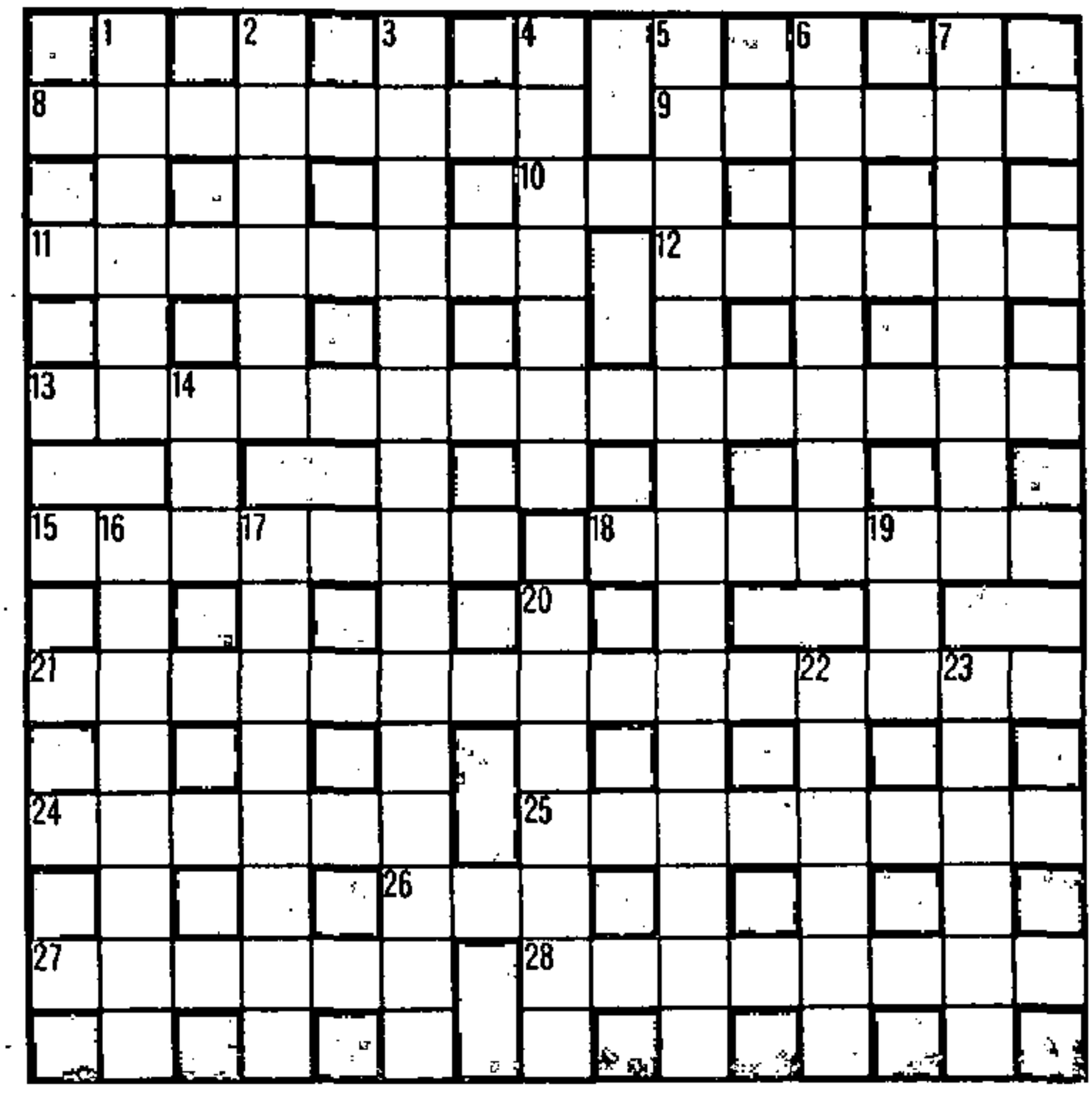

ACROSS

8 We hear domesticated girl is not from shop (4–4).

9 You can't, if you play the game! (4, 2).

10 A jollification that means trouble? (3).

11 It's strangely rude and vain, just the same! (8).

12 Difficult to feel discomfort (6).

13 Monograms on private communications? (8, 7).

15 Girls writing in scattered dales (7).

18 Oysters arranged in tiers (7).

21 Batsmen not tame dogs when called out! (4–3, 8).

24 Camel needs river to reach mountain in Israel (6).

25 Saw nothing put into a shrimp cocktail (8).

26 Kind of wood from which tiller is made? (3).

27 "You —— beauties of the night" (Wotton) (6).

28 Celebrated, with a nod, reel, leap (8).

DOWN

1 Quiet feline and what it may suddenly do? (6).

2 Foreign circuit from which no gentleman should be excluded (2, 4).

3 England's balcony seat for art-shows? (8, 7).

4 Prepared to lend a pound willingly (7).

5 In the west it makes the girl so secure (15).

6 The guiding light for a champion vaulter? (4, 4).

7 Err by attending ball in guise of a salver! (2, 6).

14 Odd part of Inverness (3).

16 Cut tail off creature and he's almost enlivened! (8).

17 Sent round a small sum of foreign money as a deposit (8).

19 A Suffolk town to watch (3).

20 In confusion with Adam, he's conscious of guilt (7).

22 Old woman's gown (6).

23 Charges the customer too much for original prints? (6).

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